



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACTS

PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES 2025

TUESDAY 11 FEBRUARY – THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER

These extracts are taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory



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MINIMUM UNIT PRICING REPEAL

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I support the minimum unit price. I urge the government to consider the other suite of measures. As the Members for Johnston and Araluen highlighted, any kind of action plan involves the local community driving it. It must be local in each and every corner of the Northern Territory, which is not homogenous; community goals and aspirations are different and require local input and foresight.

I also flag that it would be interesting to ascertain the federal Coalition's stance on removing the minimum unit price, given that the federal Opposition Leader has a firm position on alcohol.

It has been said by some people in the Territory that removing this provision is a sad time. Alice Springs will maintain a floor price, but other areas of the Territory will not which is disappointing to see.

I thank all members for a respectful debate.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, a degree of civility has descended on the House, mercifully, in respect of this debate, and there is an aspiration for cooperation in this space. This clearly affects all of us across our electorates, so I will try to honour that and temper what I have to say in that regard. I am confident that somewhere beneath it all we have a shared aspiration to reduce harm in the Northern Territory. There is no doubt that all of us acknowledge that alcohol lies at the root of a lot of problems that we have in the Northern Territory.

At the risk of being a teacher's pet or sycophantic, I am delighted to have heard from the Member for Araluen. I say that on the basis that I may have gotten the most kindred spirit in terms of a rational academic, empirical and/or economic contribution to the debate from somebody who has seen this over a long time horizon. I note that there are other people, like the Member for Gwoja, who similarly have been through various iterations of trying to deal with the vexed issue of alcohol policy and what the right mix is. Unlike the Members for Barkly, Braiting or Katherine, I do not have a nexus to these problems in the electorate I represent in quite the same way. That is the truth of it. I represent a lot of businesses and people who live in fairly affluent suburbs who are not really affected by this issue in a meaningful way. That is all the more reason why I freely admit that this is not my area of subject matter expertise.

I am mindful that I contribute to making a decision here that affects places where alcohol policy, generally speaking, is quite literally life and death. That is why I do what I can with the tools that I have to take the time to look at what the evidence and the data—which we keep bandying around in general terms—actually says.

I am encouraged that since we started sitting in October everybody is upping their game in bringing forward a diversity of opinions. It is clear from today's debate that there is a range of data sources and evidence— anecdotal, empirical, peer-reviewed, weight of testimony, lived experiences, ministers, people who have been in parliament for five terms—and all of that adds up to something. In this regard what it adds up to for me is that there is a lot of uncertainty; nobody has definitive wisdom on how to deal with alcohol policy.

After looking through hundreds of articles and hearing what everyone else has to say, I am clear that the silver bullet is not minimum unit pricing. That is why I am sufficiently satisfied to vote with my government to say that the legislation, essentially, is a straw man; it is not achieving what it was intended to. It may not be doing any harm and it may not be doing any good. It could be doing some harm if you control for other factors, but it is difficult to say.

As everybody in the Chamber freely admits, we are not interested in living in a prohibition state; nor do we think that we would ever raise the minimum unit price to the point that it is punitive on the wider Northern Territory populace. Based on all of that, rather than having some sort of culture war about it or empirical battle about whose data is better than everyone else's data, I will simply point out a couple of bits that tell me getting rid of this is fine. I do not think it will cause any great harm. I am not convinced that it will cause any great good, but I hope we will move towards a more holistic agenda that this government will hopefully lead and work on in partnership with people across the House.

I have reviewed more than 100-odd papers in relation to this. The fact is that they are predominantly about Canada and Scotland. They are the places where people have been genuinely interested in digging under the hood to see whether minimum unit pricing works, under what conditions does it work and what levers need to be controlled and pulled to make it function.

Mercifully, I will not, in the interest of time, cite hundreds of papers today. I will point out, essentially, that the contrary view is the one that is applicable, in my opinion, in this place. Therefore, I will not demonstrate the weight of opinion in defence of my position, because the weight of opinion in the literature is that minimum unit pricing in other jurisdictions has been quite successful in respect of population-level effects. However,

my contention, based on my reading of a lot of data and studies, is that it is simply not the case in this place. I am validated in maintaining that position, not just by the Member for Braitling's on-ground testimony but probably much more so, with no disrespect to him, by the Member for Araluen's testimony in respect of all the different levers we have tried to pull over time.

The recent focus in the literature is always on Scotland because that is where people have invested the most in the debate and where there are the most heavy drinkers drinking concentrated high-proof alcohol. The public health debate is set up in a specific way there.

The nuts and bolts of it is that less than 18 months ago there was plenty of stuff out there. In fairness, some of the critiques put out by the alcohol lobby and industry groups suggest that it was simply not doing any good in Scotland; there is plenty to suggest that. However, there is also plenty to suggest that it was working pretty well at a population level for Scotland. The floor price was set in 2018 at 50p in the UK. That was upped to 65p to adjust for inflation and to continue having the same effect so that a more controlled study could be run. It works there to a certain extent, and as a result the government decided to run with it as a public health policy measure.

However, it did not start yesterday in Scotland. The focus is that this is a policy we grabbed from Scotland a few years ago to try to save us, as though it is a silver bullet. That is simply not true. The truth is that minimum pricing for alcohol was introduced in Ontario, Canada, in I think the 1920s, soon after Prohibition was repealed. This has been around for a long time. Originally, minimum prices were used to stabilise alcohol markets that were operated by government-controlled alcohol monopolies, which was an important source of government revenue at that time. This goes to more than just dealing with problem drinkers; this was a serious economic agenda at one point. Widespread adoption across all Canadian provinces began in the 1990s when there was more evidence to suggest that there was a generalised public health benefit, controlled across population groups.

We only talk about those two countries, whereas a lot of countries have an MUP for spirits but not alcohol more generally. These countries include Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, where it has been difficult to evaluate what the unique effects have been owing to multiple policies being enacted at the same time. That is the point I am driving towards. Controlling for the cause and effects is difficult.

I will come to what I think are the best controlled studies in our space in a second. The reason I mentioned that laborious backstory is to explain that if you cannot control for the effect there is no point dying on a hill for this. I am convinced that there is no point dying on a hill for this one measure which I do not think has a statistically significant effect on minimising alcohol-related harm.

There has been considerable interest in evaluating the effects of the MUP in Scotland. As a result, it was introduced in Wales in March 2020 and in the Republic of Ireland in January 2022. It has stalled in the UK because people are not convinced that it might not disproportionately punitively affect one group of people without fulfilling its stated aim. That is the real challenge: how do you put something in place to be effective as a policy? The MUP is also under discussion in Northern Ireland, and it has not been implemented in England. Even in South Africa, which is not a vanguard jurisdiction for trying to do this kind of work, there has been modelling to work out whether it will help to reduce the number of heavy, problematic, chronic alcoholic-class drinkers.

Most of these places have not gone ahead with it. Most of the time it is because nobody is willing to bite the bullet on pricing this so high as to cause a significant disincentive to drinking.

I am trying to be civil in this debate. My contention is that there has never been a serious effort to use the MUP to reduce alcohol-related crime or problem drinking—\$1.50 was always a very low target, even when it was introduced initially. The Labor government had its opportunity to fight for this as a matter of principle a long time ago. If it wanted to burn its political capital on pricing it extremely high and causing population-level effects to reduce alcohol consumption in the Northern Territory it could have, but Labor chose not to.

We have been stuck with a policy that is in no-man's land and does very little other than to basically punish the populace without delivering anything back into the rehabilitation or restorative space. The money from this mark-up does not go back into the health system; it just goes into retailers' pockets. We are not pricing anyone out of the market. Everyone gets it. No-one has more credibility making that argument than—again, I do not want to seem like a teacher's pet—the Member for Araluen, who simply pointed out that people have the means to purchase at this price point. I cannot speak for the government in totality, but I cannot see any

version of a future where we make the minimum unit price \$10, so on that basis this is largely a moot argument.

There is a litany of research regarding this matter. I had a look at 250-odd papers and did the best I could to make some sense of it. I did not read them all cover to cover, but one of the best sources to get information about this is the *British Medical Journal* (BMJ). There is a tonne of stuff about minimum unit pricing, and there has been over a range of years.

I would not cite hundreds of articles, but I will point out one. It is an article from last year, published in the *British Medical Journal*, by Anderson et al titled 'Minimum unit pricing for alcohol saves lives, so why is not implemented more widely?' I am not shooting myself in the foot—relax. I am letting you know that there is stuff out there saying that this works just fine in some other places, but the point I am making is that it is not working in our jurisdiction. The key argument that these authors—whom I have no bone to pick with otherwise—make is:

... two major counter arguments impede wider rollout. The first argument is that MUP will not affect the intended target group—people who are very heavy drinkers and who might be dependent on alcohol—and might disproportionately penalise those with lower incomes, including those who are lighter drinkers. The second argument is that MUP might lead to increased production and consumption of illicit alcohol, particularly in low income settings.

They are the arguments posited for why this is not more widely rolled out. This article goes on to make the case for those two contentions not being true in the context of the spaces that they are working in. The irony is that it is those two arguments that prove why this is not worth maintaining in this place. That is exactly what happens here. We are punishing the majority for the sins of the minority without affecting the people who are most in need of help.

This is a straw man policy. We can all, with a clear conscience, get rid of it and move towards a better future where we cooperatively work under the auspices of this government to try to come up with a better set of ideas for how to manage alcohol policy.

We heard some sensible things bandied around. I maintain that I am not a subject matter expert in this area; I cannot say with clarity what will and what will not work. However, I am compelled by what I hear across the floor. There must be a better consensus position with which to move forward.

I have consistently maintained that context matters. That is the thing. Drawing random bits of this to defend my weak position here and drawing a bit of that is not helping us to progress the debate in respect to anything. We will keep having to face tough discussions about tough areas, over the next few days no less. If we consistently cling to the crappiest one-line bit of data that we have to justify a position, we will go nowhere.

I do not want to foreshadow the debate that is coming, but we are doing our best to be tough on crime, to reduce crime and to restore confidence, safety and security in the Northern Territory. That has necessarily had a knock-on effect for Corrections and the justice system. We must do something about that; we cannot be wilfully blind to it. I am not foreshadowing debate; I am simply saying that when we have these arguments more generally we need to start thinking holistically about how to solve problems rather than figuring out how to shoot down a line of argument based on one line item of data. We will not move forward in the Northern Territory to solve any problems unless we can have a more mature debate. I welcome that we are bringing in information, but let us be specific about it and agree to disagree rather than simply say, 'Your data is garbage or my data is superior'.

The most compelling evidence in this space suggests to me that MUP has not worked well. It is not that MUP never works—it works in some places—it is just that it does not always work. I argue that it has not worked here.

This is not a new argument I am making. On 22 October I spoke in this Chamber on the matter of public importance in relation to domestic, family and sexual violence. In that debate I shared with all of you a small portion of what I learnt when preparing for what we debated in October. I will not reiterate it with specificity, but I will flag it again. I raised recurrently the need to be mindful of expert evidence with specificity, rather than in generalised terms.

There were two articles I pointed out that day, both by Sarah Clifford et al 2024. Sarah Clifford is based at the Menzies School of Health. The articles were from the *International Journal of Drug Policy* and the *Drug and Alcohol Review*. One was called 'What are the impacts of alcohol supply reduction measures on

police-recorded adult domestic and family violence in the Northern Territory of Australia?’ and the second was called ‘Police-recorded adult sexual assault in the Northern Territory, Australia: Alcohol involvement and alcohol policy effects’. I cited them because they are recent and geographically specific to the place we are in; they are not about what is happening in Scandinavia, Timbuktu or Aberdeen. The contributing authors have real skin in the game where we are and they are associated with the core bodies we are trying to work with, like the Menzies School of Health Research.

I sought hard that day—I say this with sincerity—to avoid cherrypicking data selectively to distort the argument or the totality of the work. Instead, I spoke to the parameters of the studies and their conclusions by using specific quotes I read in totality from the abstracts and conclusions. I encourage you to look at it again.

Now I am paraphrasing, to be clear. Those journal articles suggested that when you controlled for everything, the only thing that probably had a statistically significant impact was PALIs. I do not have the lived experience to support that, but it seems like police auxiliaries—which the Members for Braintree and Araluen maintain are the most effective tool we have had in this space for a number of years—statistically speaking in a controlled study with proper rigour, had the greatest impact. It is not that MUP could not have more of an impact or that the Banned Drinker Register might not be part of the solution; the whole point about it is that we cannot hitch our star to a single wagon. That is where we are going wrong with a lot of these debates.

If we are to have evidence-based strategies going forward—evidence-based means something specific as well—we have to be clear that what has been done over the last eight years in particular, but even longer than that, does not have strong evidentiary support. The package in totality of the previous government’s alcohol harm minimisation legislation has not amounted to statistically significant improvement in most spaces. We can isolate singular pockets of improvement, but we cannot find definitively, overarching and overall ‘this is definitely the thing that is working; we cannot afford to lose this’. It is not there, so we must come up with something better.

I hear lots of reasonable ideas. I would like us to talk about them, in whatever context introduced by whoever as a notice or Bill, and come up with a coordinated plan and strategy for that going forward. I genuinely think it may be the one issue that we all are bound by; it is the case that we cannot avoid talking about alcohol and alcohol policy in this place.

There is no strong evidentiary support for what has been done for a while, no matter what our intuitive or anecdotal feeling. That is a problem with some of what has been presented, with respect, by the opposition and the crossbenchers. Intuitively it seems a good idea to put in place a minimum unit price and that it might work here based on it having worked well elsewhere, but it is just intuition. It is not a substantive evidence-based proposition or it is, at minimum, a contestable proposition. If I had to fight for arms of alcohol policy, I would fight the least hard for this one because it is clear, based on the controlled evidence, that it is the weakest statistically, anecdotally and empirically. I have no problem supporting its repeal.

I will not descend to unduly politicising the debate, because as the preceding speaker pointed out it has been a civil and constructive debate, and it is one that we will return to. I note, though, the idea that the pricing put in place by the previous government was ‘fair and equitable’ is disingenuous; I disagree with that proposition. It was weak and a token effort at best.

If we wanted to use minimum unit pricing as a policy mechanism to genuinely influence population-level effects as well as the problems for seriously chronic alcoholic-level drinkers, the price would have been much higher a long time ago. Spare me the arguments that once we remove this the ceiling will fall in. I do not believe that will happen.

Having said that, I respect that people are fighting for this, in no small part because they want to reduce harm and they want to do good. I believe that is a shared aspiration of all of us in this place, so let us come up with a better set of strategies to band behind, because I do not believe minimum unit pricing is the strategy we all need to get behind. Internationally, the strongest support indicates population-level effects, but I am happy to say that in my assessment the evidence is unclear at best as to whether MUP substantively assists chronic and heavy drinkers.

In sum, we need to address alcohol policy in context-specific ways. That is the language I am using for what other members have expressed in relation to local solutions, community solutions, working with people on the ground and working with people in community. Context specificity is what will take us forward in this regard, because we need to think about the people in our jurisdiction who have a problem with alcohol, their

specific preconditions and how they behave as economic agents, rather than relying on what happened on the other side of the world and assuming it will work here.

I believe that the CLP is genuinely committed to constructively moving forward in this space. I encourage all of us to think about how to make constructive contributions to debates on alcohol policy.

On the basis of all that, I am happy to commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will not keep you long. I do not have a lot to add, but it is important that I add it.

There has been a lot of talk by those opposite about evidence, academics and research papers. They tell us to listen to the experts. I have said it before and I will say it again: the experts I listen to are the good people of Blain. They tell me, and I have seen it with my own eyes, that before the minimum unit price—the floor price—was brought in by the previous government, the containers discarded by problem drinkers around Palmerston were broadly cans and the silver balloons from cask wine. Since that came in, it has changed; it is now stubbies and spirit bottles.

These often become weapons late at night, which then prompts some of the people drinking in parks, as they tell me, to smash those bottles so that they cannot be used against them later that night. This means that the people of Blain cannot take their kids out on the footpath without shoes. People must make sure they have their shoes on because there is broken glass everywhere. There are hotspots that are much worse than others. This goes onto our council rates because the council must get a streetsweeper to sweep up all the broken glass, which adds more costs to ordinary taxpayers.

There is a lot to be said in the space of dealing with problem drinkers. I thank the Member for Gwoja for bringing up the Living With Alcohol Program which, by and large, in a bipartisan way and in research is acknowledged as a successful program. It would be great if the federal government would allow us to excise alcohol so that we could maybe have another crack at it.

If there was an excise on alcohol and the funds were directly allocated towards helping problem drinkers, like the Living With Alcohol Program did, that would be great. That is not what the minimum unit price did. The increase in prices went straight into alcohol providers' pockets; it did no good for the community in that way.

I recommend that those opposite speak to their federal counterparts and ask them to come to the table with the Chief Minister's seven-point request. I thank the Prime Minister for acceding to the CASA regulation request, but it is critical that the federal government starts accepting our referrals for income management.

I see a lot of people in my electorate who struggle to resist the allure of alcohol instead of putting food on the table for their kids, buying clothes for their kids and making sure their kids get to school; they end up just drinking their payments. If we can put people who have a problem with drinking on income management plans and quarantine their income, there would be a better chance that they would use that money to feed their families.

These kids are going hungry. I deliver sandwiches to the schools. Woodroffe Primary School has a regular breakfast program because the kids come to school hungry. If a kid comes to school hungry, they are not focused on learning. It is a simple fact.

There are a lot of different parts to this. People in my electorate have not seen evidence that the minimum unit price had any real effect. We need places to put people who drink, consequences for public drinking and income management and a health response for problem drinkers. I eagerly anticipate our alcohol treatment plan, which will come out later this year, that will deal with the problem drinkers directly and not punish the rest of society for the sins of a few.

Let us get the broken glass off our streets. Let us deal with the problem where it lies.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Ms BOOTHBY (Tourism and Hospitality)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all the speakers who have contributed to the debate on this legislation. To the members who requested a briefing, which was all the CLP backbench and the Member for Johnston, thank you for having a briefing with me today.



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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

LOCAL PROBLEM SOLVING – BERRIMAH
NORTHCREST & STUART PARK

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title. His dedication to first aid, leadership and teamwork are demonstrated by his regular contributions to St John events and volunteering in the community. Liam's leadership extends far beyond St John, having served as a junior school captain. He visited the Governor-General. A brown-advanced belt in Tang Soo Do and a former competitive swimmer, Liam's well-rounded achievements highlight his commitment to personal growth and community service.

Congratulations to the Community Event of the Year which recognises the achievements of a group or entire community. This award went to the Bike You BBQ Bike Ride, which is run by Tim Walker. Bike You is a rural business where you learn to ride a motorbike safely. You can go there on a Thursday afternoon with your registered bike and go for a trail ride out the back of Howard Springs, come back and then have a barbecue.

This event has made a significant impact on the community by offering a welcoming space for individuals, particularly men, to connect through a shared passion of riding dirt bikes. Through these weekly events, Bike You fosters an inclusive environment where you can come together, build relationships and engage in important conversations, especially about mental health. We all know that men perhaps do not talk about this as much as they should; however, when you are there with a group of likeminded people you open up, and those conversations might help to save a life. The team, led by Tim Walker, are strong advocates for men's mental health, using their initiative on their weekly ride to provide a supportive space for mental health—which is a gap in the rural area. By promoting connection and offering a safe outlet for conversations, Bike You is helping the community.

I have known Tim for many years. I see him in the street and he comes in and has a chat. I am organising to go on one of those bike rides to check it out and see what is going on. I am going through a midlife crisis, so I will get into motorbike riding. We will see how that works out. I will go there and learn from the professionals. Being able to go there and talk to local men and young people is about that community safety and spirit.

I congratulate Tim on his barbecues and Bike You.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, a strength of the CLP in recent years has been its commitment to local engagement and problem-solving. That has been led by the Chief Minister in setting the standard for maintaining our accessibility to the community. People see this displayed in our commitment to attending multicultural events, mobile offices during parliamentary sittings and the electorate events that we collectively attend.

A related strength has been the willingness of our team to work together in support of problem-solving at all scales. I say 'all scales' because whilst there are big issues to tackle in this place, there are also the everyday local issues which are no less important. I am fortunate to have ministerial colleagues who have been supporting me with local problem-solving in the Fong Lim electorate. Tonight I will draw attention to a small number of things we have been working on in the expansive Fong Lim electorate, which covers 10 suburbs, focusing on Berrimah Northcrest and Stuart Park.

As I have pointed out on a number of occasions Berrimah Northcrest is a place replete with potential, but it is also filled with challenges whilst it works towards achieving critical mass as a development. It has an absence of a postal service and council services, water pressure problems, no supermarket and no prospect of local schools. We cannot deal with those things overnight, but we are trying to make strides in the right direction for the people of Berrimah Northcrest. You have to start somewhere, and we decided to start with bus services.

The CLP government is actively progressing this task to make it easier for parents and students to get to and from school every day, noting that very few of the kids who live in Berrimah Northcrest go to Haileybury; most of them go to schools in the northern suburbs and, until this point, have been disconnected from those schools.

I am grateful to the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure and his staff for the efficiency they have displayed in helping us get to the point where we are now conducting consultations to help get bus services for a range of kids living in that area.

Consultation for students in Northcrest is officially underway and closes this Friday. We now have route 100 leaving from Reuben Avenue in the middle of Berrimah Northcrest for kids to get to Darwin High School and Darwin Middle School. It also detours through Nightcliff.

A concerned parent in that electorate, Kieran Jones—I am sure he will not mind me naming him—was good enough to collect some of the information on the ground that I could work with to help us move things forward so that now his kid can get to and from school in Nightcliff every day.

Similarly, there are kids living in Berrimah Northcrest for whom the closest primary school is in the electorate of Karama at Manunda Terrace Primary School, where I went to primary school, and at Karama Primary School, where I went to Transition. We now have route 206 leaving from Berrimah Northcrest to go to Manunda and Karama Primary and on to Sanderson Middle School and Dripstone Middle School.

These are small things in the context of all the big issues we discuss in this place, but these are the things that really matter to people. This government prides itself on staying engaged with the local community. The new routes are anticipated to commence on 3 March, all things going well. Likewise, we are working on Berrimah Northcrest in its totality. Speed limit changes on Berrimah Road have been implemented, which we hope will improve pedestrian safety for all those kids who cross the road to go to Haileybury Rendall School.

I have maintained that I am committed to helping this area actualise its potential as a suburban haven for young families, and I mean that sincerely. For all our talk about stimulating housing development, population growth and housing supply, that is one of the areas which must be focused on and supported in order for us to create places for young aspirational families to get a leg up. I put the Assembly on notice that, in conjunction with the people of Berrimah Northcrest, in the coming months I will tackle council affiliation, which should long ago have been resolved for Berrimah Northcrest.

On the matter of bus routes, Stuart Park similarly had a bus servicing Stuart Park Primary School which did not go through Stuart Park. I could not believe that. It seems cheeky in adjournment to have a pot shot at my predecessor, but I was flabbergasted that Stuart Park, being the enormous suburb that it is, had a school bus that did not take half of the kids in Stuart Park to their school.

I am pleased to say that the route 464 bus, which used to cover Defence areas through Woolner and Bayview, will now extend to cover Tipperary Waters and the southern part of Stuart Park from Dinah Beach Road up, including Eden Street, Mary Street, Meigs Crescent, Gothenburg Crescent, Margaret Street, Duke Street, Frances Bay Drive, Flinders Drive, Ashley Street, Graham Street and Nudl Street. That is dozens of families with little kids with little legs who will have an easier commute.

On a related note, Stuart Park Primary School has been in desperate need of an essential security upgrade which should have been covered by minor works rectification years ago, but it was not due to whatever mismanagement took place. I am pleased to report that we have found the funds for and completed the work on essential security upgrades for Stuart Park Primary School to improve the locks and doors for the upper primary school and the main office. That work was all completed in time for the start of the year.

I am indebted to the minister for Education and her staff for ensuring that work was completed in a timely and efficient manner. I applaud the decisiveness with which she tackled the issue. There have been security issues at that school over a period of time, with doors that simply do not lock and cannot be opened from both sides. These are the essential and enabling infrastructure upgrades that somehow we lost sight of whilst we have been focused on the big-picture stuff. Thank you to the Minister for Education and Training for assisting me to help the people of Stuart Park Primary School in that regard.

I will focus on addressing local infrastructure issues, including enabling infrastructure affecting Stuart Park and, by extension, the CBD. As I have mentioned in this House several times, metaphorically speaking the neck of the body of the Northern Territory is the Stuart Park/Stuart Highway precinct leading into the CBD, which is the head of the Northern Territory. Without a strong neck you cannot have a strong head that supports itself. Over the next three years I will be championing the reinvigoration of that area focused on the Stuart Park high street. I will begin public consultations on that over the coming months with all stakeholders and the community, in conjunction with my ministerial colleagues who have been exceedingly helpful and supportive.

Plans to assist Dinah Beach Cruising Yacht Association (Dinah Beach Yacht Club)—or for those who are more familiar, the Grotty Yachty—will commence over the coming months. Do visit. If you have not been there for a while, it ain't the Grotty Yachty anymore! It is a beautiful seaside venue with excellent food, regular live music and a great atmosphere. I freely declare that I am proud to be the new patron.

Permit me to share this personal indulgence: the CLP wing went on a Wednesday night in the November sittings to have 'wings for the wing'. You will not find finer chicken wings anywhere other than those at the

Dinah Beach Yacht Club. I extend an open offer to the opposition and crossbenchers to join me at Dinah Beach for chicken wings on any given Wednesday.

In closing I note that I will never have the vigour and valour of the Members for Drysdale and Blain with their Palmerston lawnmowing service. My life's aspiration is simply to do well enough so that I never have to mow a lawn again in my life. I have not managed to realise that aspiration to this point. Notwithstanding that, my commitment to the people of Fong Lim is that I will do my best to maintain the CLP's commitment to local engagement and problem-solving.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I will take up the offer from the Member for Fong Lim to go to the Dinah Beach club to have chicken wings. I love chicken wings. I will reach out at some stage during the week, and we might head down there.

I place on the public record my congratulations to the recent Australia Day Award winners in the Daly electorate. Many members have recipients and award winners in their electorates, so I am sure we will hear more about that. The Citizen and Student Citizen Awards celebrate the remarkable efforts of Territorians who inspire us and contribute to our community every day.

I congratulate our wonderful Student Citizen Award winners: Kevin Commans, Adelaide River School; Leon Selems, Batchelor Area School; Terran Ray, Berry Springs Primary School; Bridie Lock-Grimes, Dundee Beach School; and Brendon Saunders from Tipperary Station School.

I congratulate all our Daly Citizen of the Year recipients. I will start with Belyuen community near where I live; I am down the road. Young Citizen of the Year Sally-Anne Nilco has connections to Wadeye. Many residents from Belyuen have that connection. Congratulations on being the Young Citizen of the Year. The Citizen of the Year is Denise Mclean and the Senior Citizen of the Year is Trudy Mardi. Congratulations.

Congratulations to the Coomalie region winners. The Young Citizen of the Year is Blake Harris-Jacobs. The Citizen of the Year is the wonderful Mary Ashley, who organises Friday church catch-ups on a fortnightly basis. She usually invites service providers such as CatholicCare and Anglicare to give a presentation to the constituents of Batchelor and the region. Congratulations, Mary; I look forward to catching up with you soon.

The Community Event of the Year—I know the Member for Katherine goes to this on a yearly basis—is the Rosella Festival in Adelaide River. It is a wonderful festival where we pick up different rosella or chilli jams. Congratulations to the Rosella Festival organisers in Adelaide River.

The wonderful Prue King is the Senior Citizen of the Year. She helps organise the markets and sells books at her stall. I usually purchase a book when I see her. She is also a figure in the Batchelor community. Congratulations, Prue; your award is well deserved.

I had the pleasure of going to Nauiyu community (Daly River) last week to attend the morning tea and hand out the awards. The Young Citizen of the Year is Danzel Green. He is doing amazing things. He completed Year 12 and has joined the Army. Member for Drysdale, I know that is something close to your heart. The Member for Arafura was also in the Army. Danzel is inspiring people from Nauiyu community and the region, demonstrating what can be achieved when people finish school. The Citizen of the Year is Janine Cooper. The Community Event of the Year is the Community Wellbeing event hosted by St Francis Xavier Catholic School and Patrick Fox. Congratulations to all the award winners.

The Pine Creek Citizen of the Year is Sam Forwood. I am sure many CLP members know Sam—I see the Member for Katherine just gave a fist pump for Sam—and everyone in Pine Creek knows him. One thing I respect about Sam is last year I sat with him at the seniors' Christmas dinner in Pine Creek—speaking about politics, he is a CLP member and he helped the candidate running against me—and it was heartening to put aside the politics, have dinner and talk about the issues of Pine Creek. We know there is a time for the politics to come. Congratulations, Sam; it is a well-deserved award.

In Litchfield—the Deputy Chief Minister mentioned this, but I will go through it again because it is important—the Young Citizen of the Year is Liam Fischer; the Citizens of the Year are Valerie Wilkie and Eric Chalmers and the Community Event of the Year is the Bike You BBQ Bike Ride. Congratulations.

I turn to my home community, Wagait Beach. Congratulations to the Young Citizen of the Year, Georgia (Alex) Bowers. The Citizen of the Year is Maureen Chalmers, whom we refer to as Molly. She is of Irish heritage and a delight to be around. She is hilarious and always playing tricks on people. We are never sure what she will come up with, but she always keeps us on our toes. Congratulations, Molly.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

NATIONAL APOLOGY TO AUSTRALIA'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

AFL from Tiwi—and they are leaders, despite all of that. We have to ask ourselves whether we are moving forward or leaning towards our past; are we repeating the same mistakes all over again?

I thank everyone who contributed.

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, today marks the 17th anniversary of the National Apology to the Stolen Generations, a pivotal moment in Australia's history.

On 13 February 2008 the then Prime Minister stood before parliament and delivered an apology to Indigenous Australians, acknowledging the profound grief, suffering and loss inflicted by past government policies. This Apology was not merely a symbolic gesture, but a recognition of the cold, confronting, uncomfortable truth of our nation's past.

The Apology addressed the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, communities and country. It was a formal acknowledgement of the pain endured by the Stolen Generations, their descendants and the families left behind. As the mother of three children I cannot imagine the pain that those people went through.

Although the Apology was a significant step forward towards reconciliation, as the Member for Arafura said, it was never intended to be the end of the journey. This new chapter was meant to focus on closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity. Seventeen years on we must acknowledge that progress has been slow. The latest Closing the Gap annual report shows that only five of the 19 socioeconomic targets are on track. It is a sobering reality that reminds us all that the work is far from complete.

We must strive for practical solutions that make a tangible difference in the lives of our First Nations people, particularly in the areas of safety, housing, health, education and employment.

I hope that we can use this anniversary as a catalyst for change. Let us work together—Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians alike—to write a new chapter for our nation's history, a chapter based on mutual respect, resolve and responsibility. As we reflect on the past, please let us also look to the future with determination and hope, for it is through our actions, not just our words, that we will create a more just and equitable Australia for us all.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fannie Bay from whom I always get a lesson about listening more and speaking less. It has been humbling today to listen to everything everyone had to say. I had not planned on saying anything in particular; I have no prepared notes, so we will see how this goes.

I have no specific nexus to this issue or to the Stolen Generations, and I do not want to speak for anyone else. I had the privilege, though, of being in Canberra on the day when the Apology was given. I remember it being an emotionally charged time and issue. I remember people having a range of opinions about whether an apology should be issued, what it meant, what it did not mean and who had the authority to speak on any of the issues.

We all have a right to speak in this place on all these issues. I am grateful for the diversity of voices I have heard tonight. I do not wish to speak for anyone else. I recall clearly that Hon Dr Brendan Nelson was under extraordinary pressure not to support the Apology. It was one of the more stellar moments of his leadership that he could bring together a coalition of the willing to join forces and provide a unified, dignified and respectful position and try to move things forward.

I can honestly say, hand on heart, for what it is worth that I am proud to be part of the government. I believe in the sincerity of all my colleagues on this side of the Chamber. I believe in their commitment to want to make things better for all Territorians and Indigenous Territorians.

Indigenous disadvantage begins with education. People who have represented electorates out in the bush and have a deep and abiding connection to Indigenous communities are entitled to vent frustration at the fact that in the last 17 years we have not managed to progress a range of things we aspired to in that National Apology.

I do not have any answers. I am grateful we had the opportunity to hear from everyone today on these issues. It is only by having open and respectful discussions that we can move the agenda forward.

I did not know the Member for Daly until last December when we were both forced to be at the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference in Victoria, briefly. I got to know him a little as a human being, and he is not a bad bloke. I would like to hear his grandad's story at some point.

I think it is great that everybody could make a contribution today and recognise the anniversary of the Apology.

Madam SPEAKER: I pay my respects to the Stolen Generation of the Northern Territory on this 17th anniversary of the National Apology. I acknowledge the pain and suffering they have experienced, and I wish them peace, love and kindness going forward.

I, too, would love to have heard the story of your grandparents, Member for Daly, because they come from a part of the world that I know well, at the top of the Clarence River. Maybe we can have a cup of tea one day, and you can tell me the story.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Mr MACKAY (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I raise a deeply concerning incident that occurred within the parliamentary precinct yesterday. On Wednesday 12 February, on a sitting day of the NT parliament, a federal staff member of Senator Malarndirri McCarthy attempted to physically intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly.

The independence and liberty of all MLAs in this Chamber is of the utmost importance and is essential to the Westminster system. It should be of great concern to all in this Chamber and in the Northern Territory that a staff member for a Cabinet minister in the federal Albanese government attempted to intimidate and harass a member of this Assembly.

All representatives of the people, at all levels of government in Australia, must ensure we uphold a free and democratic society. Why Senator McCarthy's staffer set out to intimidate a Territory MLA is unknown. However, he followed up his physical intimidation with harassment and unfounded accusations.

To the members of the NT Labor Party, I hope you share similar concerns that our NT parliament should be free of intimidation and harassment, especially from federal taxpayer-funded staff.

I hope the Prime Minister takes swift action on the senator's office and the staff member who actively attempted to intimidate a Member of the NT Legislative Assembly and did so on Parliament House grounds on a sitting day of parliament.

Given what has already been widely reported in terms of the behaviour of staff from the Leader of the Opposition in this place, I call on the Leader of the Opposition to speak with her federal ALP colleagues, as a leader of her organisation in the NT, to make clear to her members and supporters that this behaviour is unacceptable and to prevent this sort of action from taking place again.

I make it clear that behaviour of this type is unacceptable, and I will not hesitate to call it out when it takes place. Although I refrain from naming the individual involved at this time or mentioning his personal connections to this place, I have no qualms naming this community member if these actions and behaviour continue in any way.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, I celebrate remarkable individuals and cultural milestones within our Casuarina community—moments that reflect the spirit of service, dedication and multiculturalism that define the Northern Territory.

It is my privilege to recognise Mr Michael Foley OAM, who has been named the 2025 NT Senior Australian of the Year. In many cultures, especially in my culture, elders are revered as pillars of wisdom, strength and compassion. For more than 40 years Michael has embodied these values, ensuring that senior citizens are not only recognised but also celebrated.

In 2014 he founded Seniors of Excellence NT, a platform dedicated to honouring the contributions of elders. Since its inception 183 seniors have received the Seniors of Excellence NT Award highlighting their lifetime of achievements. Michael's dedication extends beyond this initiative. He has given his time and resources to



NORTHERN TERRITORY
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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DEFENCE INVESTMENT IN THE
NORTHERN TERRITORY

THURSDAY 13 FEBRUARY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I am heartened by the minister for Housing's announcement yesterday that we are looking to make substantial legislative reforms and other measures to make tenants responsible and accountable for their behaviour. The minister said:

The pendulum has swung too far in defending the rights of individuals, and we will take action. In 2025 we will act on public housing reform. We will look at the Residential Tenancies Act and how to align it with community expectations.

The visitor management, tenancy management and Red Card policy all need to be reviewed.

The minister cited a specific example brought to his attention:

... a tenant had 62 Red Card demerit points under Labor and was allowed to continue living in that house. This has all been allowed to happen while there is an eight to 10-year waitlist.

Note that there are many good people on that waitlist who are looking for housing and willing to do the right thing.

This year we will act. To the residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, I am here for you. This government, including the minister, my MLA colleagues and I, are working to support our Territory community by strengthening our housing policy so that we can evict people when we need to.

I am a strong supporter of the need for public housing. I have many deserving residents who respect the privilege of being allocated public housing and many others on the eight to 10-year waitlist who would do the same. Here is a message for those tenants who blatantly disrespect this privilege and assume they are free to destroy our neighbourhoods: your time is up.

To the responsible residents of Karama, Malak and Knuckey Lagoon, I am here for you.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I will again talk about my expansive Fong Lim electorate, which has residential areas like Stuart Park, Bayview, Woolner and The Narrows; industrial areas like Berrimah, Wishart and Winnellie; and special purpose areas, like Charles Darwin National Park and Hidden Valley. However, tonight I will focus on Coonawarra, Eaton, East Arm and Defence service-adjunct precincts, which we do not talk about enough in this House, as far as I am concerned ...

Mr Howe: Great topic.

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you, Member for Drysdale.

I do so to underscore the significance of Defence investment for our economic future. It will be critical to us realising a prosperous economic future.

I had the privilege on 24 January to join the Chief Minister in her capacity as Minister for Defence NT for her launch of NT Defence Week, which also included Defence industry and Defence veterans' awards launches. We gathered at Shorebarge, which is a business at East Arm. It is a marine logistics firm with experienced vessel masters who operate landing barges and execute safe beach landings and wharf moorings.

The stakeholders at that session were the kind of people who already know in many ways how important Defence is to our future. They included people from the Army's 1st Brigade, Master Builders, ICN NT, the Chamber of Commerce, the Australian Industry and Defence Network, Charles Darwin University and the NT Indigenous Business Network, as well as hardworking public servants in DefenceNT. That is preaching to the choir, to some extent; that is a group of people who understand how important Defence industries are to us.

I will speak about the economic multiplier effect of Defence industries and Defence investment. Our government is focused on trying to stimulate economic growth, and that is the right strategy. One of the five areas on which we are concentrating to try to stimulate that growth in is Defence. It is important to understand what a potent economic multiplier effect Defence spend has in the Northern Territory. In fact, it is disproportionately large relative to any other industry.

ICN NT—which all of us in the Chamber would agree provides good data for us to work with comparatively in understanding supply chains, logistics and business in the Northern Territory—estimates that almost 70% of reported contracts in Defence over the past seven years went to local companies, not FIFO or fly-by-night

companies. If you translate that, it is something like \$800m of the total \$1.15bn spend that has been circulating through the NT economy.

Defence does not just spend in little pockets by themselves; it ends up chipping into our businesses, shops, contractors and supply chains. It is critically important that we do everything that is required to make sure we secure our Defence future. Why do I say that? Because it is not a sure thing. I will drop back a step.

In August 2023 ACIL Allen produced the Economic Impacts of Defence Infrastructure in the Northern Territory report. This is great for those of you who are looking for a bit of light reading to understand how to improve our economic prospects. It is an excellent overview of the economic, Defence industry and construction industry landscapes and how they intermingle.

This report, if it is to be believed—I admit it may be a little on the optimistic side in some regards—paints a rosy picture of how important Defence industries are here. According to this report, the Defence sector is expected to invest up to \$6.2bn in the Northern Territory by 2027, potentially contributing \$800m per annum to the current levels of construction activity to the Top End as well. The Defence sector could create upwards of 7,000 jobs in the Northern Territory—4,000-plus directly in construction and 3,000-plus across the economy—and add almost 5% to gross state product. However, that is if the NT can sustain high levels of local investment. That is key.

What we want is a Defence future where Defence has a footprint in the Northern Territory; what we want to move against is the prospect of a FIFO Defence future, which is a real risk unless we lobby the federal government to ensure our Defence security going forward.

There are two overall findings in this report that are worth noting. First, the NT construction industry has a track record of delivering on industry needs. Even though we have workforce limitations, when we need our workforce to kick in it does kick in. The NT's civil works capacity is underutilised and ready to deliver projects. If you look at CDU Danala and across the harbour, you see that we can deliver. The industry locally, including businesses in East Arm and in my electorate across Fong Lim, has the capacity to scale up when we need it to scale up. More alarming is the second overall finding that policy action is required to address the constraints on industry.

Four of the findings that came out of this, findings 15 to 18, are worth reflecting upon. We need: a workforce strategy for the construction industry; to address barriers to temporary and permanent migration; a Northern Territory population strategy; and to address accommodation shortages in order to build a local workforce.

These are issues I have consistently brought up, and they impact our Defence future. Staff retention issues have been used as a justification for scaling down troop numbers in the north. This government is committed to improving liveability in the Northern Territory, which is a critical part of making sure that Defence wants to be here as well.

I am not the only person saying these things. People who are passionate about advocating in this area, like Dr John Coyne at the Australian Strategic Policy Institute and Dave Malone, former CEO of Master Builders, have been writing about it for a long time in things like *The Strategist* and ASPI. I encourage members to read some of the things that they have written.

In 'To build its future, northern Australia needs clarity from Defence' we can reflect on, for example, Bandiana being a long way from the Northern Territory and that decision conveying a lack of commitment to northern Australia.

'Taking Defence beyond the barbed wire in northern Australia' points out that a fly-in fly-out model for Defence operations is something that is being bandied about if we do not push harder to fight our corner. Likewise, the real challenge is ensuring continued work for those who need to stay in the north, when it comes to Defence being an employer of choice in the construction workforce space.

The most important thing I want to reflect on is from 'Australia must think more about Defence's position in the nation's north':

Somehow and quickly, given the urgency articulated in the DSR, ...

That is the Defence Strategic Review:

... we need to get better at linking everyone to be more organised and to avoid simply using a model that assumes activities will self-organise.

It will not happen by accident. It would be a mistake to think that Defence will just land here even if we do not try for it. Do not assume Defence investment will come automatically due to existing bases or what was written in the Defence Strategic Review; it is wishful thinking. Delays and reprioritisation of Defence works are evidence of that. A good recent example is the shifting of helicopter assets and support workforce to Townsville. We need to lobby to make sure that those kinds of things do not happen.

The Defence Strategic Review is a wonderful document, but the gap between the rhetoric of it and the reality of its implementation in the north is wide. It should matter to everybody in this House. We will have to work with the federal government to make sure that we fight our corner when it comes to Defence. Defence spending is highly political, and funds are being redirected to southern states for economic and political reasons. We need to actively lobby Defence and the federal government to secure Defence investment and see actual follow-through on the Defence Strategic Review.

I am pleased to say that our government is committed to realising the potential of the strategic review, in conjunction with the federal government. You could tell the shift in optimism from the range of stakeholders at Shorebarge in East Arm the other day knowing that they have a government committed to fighting our corner on Defence and a Chief Minister who also represents Defence industries.

The next sensible opportunity for all of us to do something positive in this space will be NT Defence Week, which is coming up at the end of April. I encourage you all to add it to your calendars, because it is important that we put on a united show to say that Defence matters to the Northern Territory in terms of not just personnel but also businesses, supply contracts and the entire Defence ecosystem. It is an opportunity to engage with the sector, families and suppliers. For me personally it is an opportunity to generate greater engagement and exposure of local Defence businesses, particularly those based in the Fong Lim electorate, for which I will be advocating.

Ms CAHILL (Port Darwin): Madam Speaker, one of the truly great things about being the Member for Port Darwin in this Legislative Assembly is that I get to meet amazing people. One of those people is Hriday Nayyar.

I was privileged to join Hriday, along with my colleagues the Members for Fannie Bay, Casuarina and Brennan, at the launch of his first book, *Life Chronicles: Experiences and Challenges*. This wonderful book reflects on Hriday's journey since coming to Australia and ultimately calling Darwin his home, along with his parents and siblings. It is a wonderful story of personal growth, the journey of overcoming challenges in education and career and the importance of building strong community connections. Hriday wrote his book with the intention of inspiring young individuals, particularly those in the Northern Territory, to pursue their dreams while contributing to the advancement of society.

Hriday is a wonderful example of the amazing contributions our international students make to the Territory. He is about to complete his studies to become a secondary school teacher in the NT education system, which is evidence that as we attract our international students to live and work in this wonderful place we call the Territory, we are building a future for the Territory at the same time.

I congratulate the recipient of my December Larrakeyah Primary School citizenship award, Shusank Ghimire, a middle/upper primary school student who received the award for representing the school values and looking after the school environment.

Congratulations to the recipients of my annual overall citizenship awards.

Alexis Zemaitis received the early childhood award for displaying the school values at all times throughout the year and supporting classmates and peers when in times of need.

Sampurna Sapkota got the middle/upper primary school award for displaying the school values at all times throughout the year and being an outstanding role model across the school. I think the future of our Territory is in good hands when we see these young students coming through, leading by example for their classmates.

I also congratulate Milly Ravlich, who has been selected to participate in the Northern Territory junior representative calisthenics team. Milly will travel with the team to Adelaide in July, where they will compete in the Australian Calisthenic Federation's AusCaliCarnivale national competition. The event hosts teams of



NORTHERN TERRITORY
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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

TERRITORY COORDINATOR

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

13 local sporting clubs, two other local stakeholders and more than 100 community members as part of the consultation.

Later this month I expect to receive the first draft of the master plan which will be released publicly for a second round of consultation, enabling further review and refinement. The final master plan will be launched later this year.

The involvement of sports organisations, local clubs and community members will ensure that all voices are heard, including those of smaller and emerging sports. I encourage the community to provide feedback to this master plan which we believe will establish a long-term vision for the Marrara sports precinct that fosters community engagement, promotes a healthy lifestyle and strengthens the economic viability of the Northern Territory.

I know the Member for Fannie Bay is passionate about sports, and I am sure that over the next few weeks we can announce more exciting things happening in sports.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper.

ANSWER TO QUESTION Crime Statistics

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I clarify for the record an answer to a question asked by the Member for Arafura. The crime statistics have always been three months in arrears, including under Labor. That has not changed under the CLP government. On 21 March, which is this week, the January figures will be updated on the website. On 18 April the February figures will be updated on the website.

TERRITORY COORDINATOR BILL Serial 17

Continued from earlier this day.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, since being elected to government I have taken every opportunity to address all matters economic in this House repeatedly, noting that they have long been neglected by this parliament.

I have spoken at length in support of the model for the Territory Coordinator, notably on 27 November. To reiterate in summary, major projects have been in a state of limbo for a long time. Regulatory inefficiency has undoubtedly played a part in that process. The intention of this Bill is to address these deficiencies in process and to improve our economic and industrial competitiveness, which I support in principle.

Earlier my learned colleague the Treasurer referenced the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission and the report written by that entity. This was the last comprehensive blueprint for economic development in the Northern Territory. It is an interesting document to reflect on when we are talking about a new way forward because large parts of that blueprint are testament to why we have a problem.

There were five sections to that report. The first was about winning investment and requiring a strong strategic approach. That area was well fleshed out.

The second area focused on the sectors that would drive growth. It talked about energy transition; decarbonisation and sustainable industry; manufacturing; resources; agribusiness; tourism; security and Defence; and the maritime, digital and space industries. These are things that we are all looking to systematically progress.

The third area was about growth occurring in the regions in partnership with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal economic leadership and regional prioritisation.

The fourth area of the report was about actioning the enablers to support investment—infrastructure systems; access to land, water, power and digital connections; logistics and supply chains; and regulation.

The last section was about industry growth needing a skilled population.

The problem with that blueprint was that sections 1, 2 and 4 were reasonably well thought out and well fleshed out, but sections 3 and 5 were basically threadbare, empty and only a couple of pages long, and testament to the fact there was not much of a strategy for how to provide a coordinated plan on major projects growth in the Northern Territory.

The document also laid out a blueprint for a commission structure to try to expedite some of these processes, fast-track approvals and create regulatory efficiency. What was initially meant to be a single point of coordination with one commissioner ended up being three commissioners. We ended up going from a single source to coordinate and fast-track projects to having a tsar on major projects, a tsar on investment and a tsar on infrastructure.

I raise these points because I know firsthand that the coordination between the objectives of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission report and the commissioners was, to put it mildly and politely, poor. I am intimately familiar with the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission report and the commission's structure as the precursor to the Territory Coordinator model. I know that because I returned to the Northern Territory 18 months ago to be the fourth commissioner. I returned here to try to create coordination and efficiency within that system because we do not have a single point of contact to coordinate workforce, skills, population, migration, talent acquisition and higher education. We lacked someone to look at the labour component.

I would not ordinarily draw attention to this, but I do so today to establish my bona fides in this debate. That is to say, and hear me clearly, that I contend the status quo on project management is not working. That is my starting proposition, and that is why I offered my qualified support for the Territory Coordinator proposal from the outset, before the release of the Bill in its current form, back in November in relation to environmental protections. I believe we need to do things differently if we are to create a better regulatory environment for investment. At the moment we clearly have shortcomings in that area. That is the first substantive point I make.

The second substantive point is important for everyone in this House to be mindful of. It is a more pointed point; it is a legal point. It is the prerogative of this parliament and the legislature to make law for the good governance of the Northern Territory, under the auspices of the Commonwealth *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978*. Section 6 of the Act stipulates the legislative power of this body:

Subject to this Act, the Legislative Assembly has power, with the assent of the Administrator or the Governor-General, as provided by this Act, to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Territory.

I recognise the many concerns raised by members of the community and interested stakeholders in response to this Bill. As the Chair of the scrutiny committee reported this morning, the vast majority of submissions indicated concerns about the Bill. I can say, hand on heart, that I have read all the submissions to the scrutiny committee that are publicly available, and I read the subsequent majority report and the dissenting reports written by the member of the Labor Party and the crossbench member. Some of the concerns raised are alarmist and display a limited understanding of the legislation; however, equally, many valid concerns are raised as well throughout the course of the legislation.

I am grateful that the government, the opposition and the crossbenchers have all provided suggested amendments to this Bill. The process we are meant to follow is to consider all those amendments with sincerity and at face value. I encourage the Assembly to take its responsibility seriously in this regard, noting that the government has a mandate to implement a law which has been widely forecast for a number of years, but about which there are a number of legitimate concerns. It is incumbent on all of us to take on board those concerns, consider all the amendments systematically and ensure that the law we put in place has the best possible chance of delivering on its intended outcome.

With respect to what I said earlier in relation to the Self-Government Act, let me be clear that I am not a jurist and I am not a legal scholar; therefore, I defer to a higher authority in confirming my rationale for supporting this Bill.

In submission 443 to the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs on the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 the President of the NT Law Reform Committee, Hon Austin Ashe, pointed out the following. In relation to the power of the Legislative Assembly to pass the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* and its challenge and being upheld in the courts, he argued that this was the appropriate way to challenge such laws. I quote from the committee *Hansard* from 14 April 2008, at page 64:

... the only proper way to attack the power of the Territory to pass that particular act was through the courts. That in fact was done by the application to the full court of the Supreme Court. That application was interrupted because the act was then repealed. But had it gone to the full length of an appeal to the High Court—although it may be temerarious to predict what the High Court will do—we feel that the High Court would probably have upheld the decision of the majority of the full court. The point we make is that that is the way to go. Either the Territory has the power, in which case it should be allowed to exercise it because it has been given self-government, or it does not have the power, in which case the court should so rule.

It is not for me to adjudge whether this law constitutes executive overreach or is ultra vires. Vis-a-vis non-exhaustively section 12, 'Powers, privileges and immunities of Legislative Assembly', and section 31, 'Extent of executive power', of the *Northern Territory (Self-Government) Act 1978* that is a matter only for the courts. I therefore confine my remarks only to the area of authority within my remit and provide my qualified support for the Bill as a member of the legislature and of the governing party whose prerogative it is to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Territory.

Mr PATEL (Casuarina): Madam Speaker, the Northern Territory is full of opportunity—vast land, rich resources and hardworking people—but for too long we have been held back not by a lack of vision, but by slow approvals and excessive red tape. It is costing Territorians due to lots of bureaucratic delays. We have lost billions in investment because projects were stuck in government paperwork.

A \$1.5bn agribusiness project that could have created hundreds of jobs was lost due to years of delay. Investors walked away from a Darwin ecotourism expansion that waited three years for approval. A renewable energy project that could have put the NT on the map was held back until others overtook us. Each delay costs jobs, and each slow approval means another business walks away.

The Territory Coordinator Bill is our answer, as a Territory that says 'yes' to opportunity. It creates the Territory Coordinator, a single point of contact to fast-track approvals and remove unnecessary delays. We will cut red tape so that major projects do not get stuck for years, step in when government agencies are slowing things down and make sure businesses have the infrastructure they need on time without delay. From delays to delivery it will have a real impact for Territorians.

This Bill is about real people, jobs and growth. When a mining project in Tennant Creek is ready to create 500 jobs we will not let bureaucracy get in the way. When the solar energy company wants to invest in the Barkly we will give them certainty—and fast. When housing developments are needed in Palmerston we will not let approvals drag on for years while families wait. Government must move at the speed of business, not the other way around.

We will protect the environment and respect community voices, but we will remove unnecessary obstacles. Environmental and community protections will stay in place. Consultations will remain a priority, but we will not let bureaucracy stop good projects. This is not about cutting corners; this is about cutting red tape.

We need a bold, decisive step for Territorians. Today we have a choice: we can stay stuck watching investment slip away, jobs disappear and projects stall; or we can take action, saying yes to investment, jobs and growth. The time for action is now. Enough waiting, excuses and lost opportunities—let us pass this Bill and build a stronger, faster and more prosperous Northern Territory. Let us get it done.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, today is a sad day for the Territory, for country and for the Territory's waterways. This legislation is fundamentally flawed. No amount of glitter and fanfare and no number of press releases can make this shine. This Bill is the turd of the Territory because it undermines important protections and regulation.

The Members for Fong Lim and Casuarina spoke about government bureaucracy not working and doing its job. I remind members opposite—newsflash—you are the government, and you have the ability to work within your departments and agencies to do the work to help change that. You still think you have to attack the government; you are the government. You do not need to be attacking government bureaucracy; you need to be working as a government and as a Cabinet to look at reforming and making things better to suit the needs of the Territory, the environment and the regulations that are needed to provide greater protection and certainty for business if that is what you are doing.

I stand firm with my community and voice my opposition to the Territory Coordinator Bill. This proposed Bill raises serious concerns about transparency, accountability and the potential erosion of community trust in decision-making.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

THE HON AUSTIN ASCHE AC KC

TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

His Honour's legacy will endure for generations to come in every student who walks the halls of Charles Darwin University, every young lawyer who steps into a courtroom with a commitment to justice and every Territorian who believes that service to the community is of the highest calling.

We say farewell to an exceptional man, but we do so in the knowledge of and gratitude for the impact his life will forever have on the Territory.

On behalf of the Territory Labor team I offer my sincere condolences to Mr Asche's children, Wendy and Harry; to the grandchildren; and to all the family, friends and former colleagues of Mr Asche.

May he rest in peace.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts ...*

Tonight I will speak to the many parts of the rich life lived by a Shakespearean, Hon Austin Asche AC, KC.

His Honour passed away in December 2024 at the age of 99, leaving behind an extraordinary legacy of service, leadership and dedication to the Northern Territory.

Austin Asche was born in Melbourne on 28 November 1925. He grew up in Darwin, and his early education was at Darwin Primary School. He served in the RAAF during the final years of the Second World War. He studied law at the University of Melbourne and graduated with a BA, an LLM, and then was admitted to the Queensland Bar before being called to the Victorian Bar in 1954, where he practised for 20-plus years.

He took silk in 1972, and in 1976 was appointed to the newly formed federal Family Court of Australia. He served as a Supreme Court Judge of the Northern Territory and later as Chief Justice from 1987 to 1993. He was made a Companion in the Order of Australia in 1994. In 1993 he resigned the Chief Justiceship to assume the role of the 15th Administrator of the NT, serving from 1 March 1993 to 16 February 1997.

These are the bald facts and particulars of His Honour's life and career. My focus, however, is on His Honour's contribution as President of the Law Reform Committee of the Northern Territory for over 20 years, from 1997 to 2018. I choose to focus on this because, quite deliberately, I want to engage with more than those bare-bullet points and try to shine a light on His Honour's depth of commitment to the laws of the Northern Territory.

His Honour's period of contribution as Chair was between 1997 and 2018, over which period he was aged between 71 and 92. Stop to think about that for a second: while everyone else at age 70 may have gone out and played a round of golf or two, Austin Asche decided to devote himself for the best part of another 20 years to chairing a law reform committee. Notwithstanding that, he was a fine sportsman. He rowed in pairs, fours and eights in his younger years and, as the Chief Minister pointed out, he was also playing competitive tennis well into his nineties.

In his capacity as Chair, under his presidency, that committee produced a staggering 26 reports—a staggering body of work that I would wager to say surpasses the combined volume of written output of all the MLAs in this room. With the exception of one report, he was involved in every one of those. For the 25 subcommittees responsible for examining the complex legal issues involved, he prepared many of the reports; in fact, he drafted a lot of the stuff himself.

His fingerprints are visible—sometimes subtly; other times more blatantly and cheekily—in the reports that he wrote. The start of the Report on the Uniform Evidence Act begins with a Dickensian quote from chapter 34 of *The Pickwick Papers*:

'Oh, quite enough to get, Sir, as the soldier said ven they ordered him three hundred and fifty lashes,' replied Sam.

'You must not tell us what the soldier, or what any other man, said, Sir,' interposed the judge; 'it's not evidence.'

Looking at the 26 reports gives you an idea of the importance of the subject matter and the hard work involved in those reports. I will cite a few of them: Report 18, Report on the Law of Property; Report 23, Report on Privilege Against Self-incrimination; Report 25, Report on the Right to Silence; Report 26, Report on Whistleblowers Legislation; Report 28, Report on Aboriginal Customary Law; Report 30, Report on the Uniform Evidence Act; Report 36, Report on Defendants Submitting to Psychiatric or Other Medical Examination; Report 39, Report on Self-induced Intoxication; and Report 43, Report on the Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images.

Austin Asche did all this voluntarily, without being remunerated for his efforts. Not for a penny did he have a hand in 26 law reform committee reports. Many of these reports provide the basis for important changes in the laws that are still with us in the Northern Territory. Indulge me to provide three examples.

Report 18, Report on the Law of Property, from October 1998, led to the *Law of Property Act 2000*. This is a good example of the importance of the Law Reform Committee's work because no-one ever talks about general NT property law as opposed to residential tenancies, and that is because the *Law of Property Act 2000* is particularly good legislation. It is clear, comprehensible, fair and based on established legal principles and, therefore, it is predictable.

A second example is Report 30, Report on the Uniform Evidence Act, from September 2006. It led to the *Evidence (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011* in the NT, which is used every day in courts in this jurisdiction and brings the Territory into line with every other Australian jurisdiction on a matter of significant importance.

Report 43, Report on the Non-Consensual Sharing of Intimate Images, similarly led to the *Criminal Code Amendment (Intimate Images) Act 2018*.

As you can see, Austin Asche was not just a hobbyist; he was actively reforming our laws from the sidelines in the most appropriate manner. Some of the reports he authored, penned or contributed to resulted in recommendations to do nothing, which is advice that is equally important as recommendations to make changes. For example, Report 25, Report on the Right to Silence, from 2002 finishes with this paragraph:

This Committee believes that it can create a record with the shortest recommendation ever recorded by any Law Reform Agency in Australia or elsewhere.

The task given this Committee was to consider the rationale of the UK Criminal Justice and Public Order Act and the question essentially asked was whether it was expedient for the Northern Territory parliament to adopt it or some variant of it.

To that question this Committee records the following and only recommendation:

No.

That was on page 37 of a report which before then had provided a very thorough analysis of the historical foundation of the right to silence, which explained the one-word recommendation.

Therein is where we see His Honour's skilfulness. He was not just highly intelligent and articulate; he had a profound knowledge of what others had said and experienced in the past and on the same legislative topics. He deployed that knowledge and experience to the great advantage of the Northern Territory.

To put it another way, he utilised data and research in a context-specific manner—something we should all take heed of in this House. Legislators who do not investigate and understand what lawmakers have tried in the past and where they failed or succeeded, risk missing out on the benefits of that experience. It is important for this House to make sure that we continue to look out for and get the benefit of learning from scholars like His Honour.

His Honour was also a fierce advocate for the Northern Territory in constitutional affairs and passionately defended the autonomy of this legislature. In the Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs Inquiry into the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill in June 2008, he cited, at page 46:

Any Commonwealth enactment based on policy—that is, based on a difference of opinion between the Commonwealth and the Territory—is of course an interference with the self-government of the Territory. If the Commonwealth disagrees with a policy of a territory then the grant of self-government is really illusory.

Similarly, at page 47, His Honour pointed out if the size of the legislature or a jurisdictions population became the reason to query the legitimacy of a legislature, then:

...the Tasmanians ought to be starting to feel very uncomfortable, because there are only 400,000 or so of them. If you do grant self-government to a series of bodies, then you allow them to determine themselves within their own province...If you say that the citizens of the Territory are immature—and that means that perhaps the citizens of Tasmania are just slightly more mature and the citizens of South Australia perhaps a little bit more mature—by all means do so, but that means that you should not be passing self-government acts.

Of course, His Honour was nevertheless widely regarded as a very measured and balanced judge and careful in his remarks. To which end, on the limits of the legislature, he also had this to say, and I quote from page 36 of the Report on the Right to Silence, from March 2002:

A further reason for discouraging the presentation of such legislation in the Northern Territory is based on practical financial considerations. Assuming the Territory parliament were the first to enact such legislation there would be no doubt that it would be subject to at least one, and more likely, several, challenges to its validity, its precise meaning and its constitutionality. Such challenges would invariably end up in the High Court accompanied not only by counsel for the Territory and the appellant, but also no doubt, by a galaxy of legal talent seeking to intervene on behalf of various States or interested parties. The subsequent expense for the Territory would be enormous, and while this committee has no desire to discourage legislative pioneering, there may be better causes for the Territory than to lead the way in an expedition which may well prove to have the same frustrations and expenses as that undertaken by Messrs Bourke and Wills...

Hon Austin Asche was truly a gentleman and a scholar. The NT was blessed to be gifted by his legal talents. His life was one of exemplary service in the judiciary but also the military, as an Administrator and as an educator. A separate speech adjunct to this one might have reflected on his contributions to our local university, as Chancellor amongst other things.

He was a public servant of the highest order, the calibre of which is seldom found and unlikely to be replicated. His memory will be cherished by all who were privileged to know him. His example of leading with humility, grace and substance will continue to guide. Verily to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.

Vale, Austin Asche.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I pay my respects to Hon Austin Asche AC, KC and acknowledge his family and friends in the Chamber. I send my love to all those who feel his loss.

I met Austin many times in many different contexts, and he was always warm, wise, charming and entertaining. He was one of a kind who contributed so much to the Northern Territory.

I will read some words from his and my friend, Russell Goldflam. Russell shared his words with me, and they capture Austin far better than I can, so I asked his permission to share them here:

‘Dear Austin,

‘Ninety-nine years of life, 999 years of wisdom and the effervescent ever-inquiring enthusiasm of a nine-year-old lad. I only knew you for the final quarter of your century, a mere 25 years of scholarship, leadership and friendship. I loved your strict compassion, your eccentric orthodoxy, your casual erudition and your inexhaustible store of story, trivial and profound. You ushered me through secret doors to Shakespeare and Dickens, to your far northern forebears and their ancient sagas, to the civilised wilds of the Savage Club but most of all to the law, both common and uncommon.

‘Thank you.’

I join with Russell, and so many others who are close with Austin and are feeling his loss, in sending love to Wendy, who has been so devoted in his last leaner years, and expressing condolences to all his family and friends.

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak on behalf of me and my husband, Professor Len Notaras AO, in memory of Hon Austin Asche AC, KC.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

INAUGURAL COMEDY FESTIVAL &
DARWIN ENTERTAINMENT CENTRE

WEDNESDAY 19 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

It is important for the CLP government to be reminded of honouring the commitments to water quality, security and regulations as part of the inquiry by Justice Pepper. Working with the Commonwealth will also enable the Territory to have a comprehensive understanding of the Commonwealth water trigger and what it means, how it can be enacted and any consequential flow-on effects that has on the Territory.

It is important that we get this right. There are many pieces to the water puzzle. I have highlighted a number of areas that I believe are a step in the right direction. There will always need to be work done in this space because the landscape will change. As we try to respond and adapt to and address climate change, we will have to deal with the consequences of that; we will also have to deal with consequences of inaction on climate change.

I thank honourable members for indulging me in this motion tonight. I understand that there are several members who wish to speak. I am interested in hearing from members of the CLP government as to whether they will accept this motion and bring a safe drinking water Act before parliament in this term of government. I am interested in hearing whether they will agree to a moratorium on new water licences and whether they will support an independent review in partnership with the Commonwealth.

This is an opportunity for the CLP to demonstrate that it has learnt from the history of its party, when the CLP focused only on giving water allocations to their mates and political candidates. It is an opportunity to learn from that and move forward.

As I said at the start of my speech I cannot change the past, but I can be involved in shaping the future. As a parliament we can shape the future together and develop a series of comprehensive water security and water quality reforms because it is the right thing to do. Every one of us depends on access to water and to good-quality drinking water. Without it we do not exist, and our country and landscapes do not exist. Without it we are not healthy; we are deprived. We cannot survive without water. As many of our environmental groups rightly put it, water is life, and without it we are nothing.

I am mindful of the time, and I acknowledge that this will appear as an order of the day. I very much look forward to working with the parliament to bring back this motion. Many members should have a say on this because our constituents expect us to have a clear position on a number of elements that are in this motion.

I look forward to speaking about this further. I urge government members to consider the motion, as we will bring it back shortly. I am happy to meet with any member of parliament to talk about the motion and any additional amendments that may be required to get it over the line and have this comprehensive work undertaken.

Debate suspended.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am privileged to report that I represented my colleague, Hon Jinson Charls, Minister for Arts, to launch the inaugural Darwin Comedy Festival recently. I thought we could all use a bit of levity and that it was worth reflecting on what a great event it was.

The minister and I are frequently confused for being one another, and it was nice for a change to go to an event and be confused for being Nazeem Hussain. I suspect that was the primary reason I got subbed in at the last minute for the event, but I was delighted to attend, nevertheless.

The festival was held over three days from 6 to 8 March at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. By all measures the event was a raging success and brought in large crowds with dozens of fantastic sold-out shows. Darwin and our visitors deserve the best live performance experiences that Australia has to offer, and this festival delivered some of that. Some of the best comedians in the country flew to the Top End for our audiences to enjoy. In total 57 comedians performed at the festival, bringing our community together and sharing some much-needed laughter and joy with all of us.

The stellar line-up of headline comedians included luminaries like Celeste Barber; Reuben Kaye; Sammy J; Luke McGregor; Geraldine Hickey; the Aboriginal Comedy Allstars; and, of course, Nazeem Hussain. These headliners were supported by a show for families, including Children are Stinky—which I can report was more pleasant to attend than it sounds—and, importantly, an amazing line-up of local comedians thanks to Sarah Reuben, Brent Watkinson and the team at Top Floor Comedy who coordinated the Laugh Lounge shows.

A shout-out goes to some of my constituents in that regard for supporting local comedy, notably Briant and Monica from The Last Supper Pizzeria, who regularly put on comedy outside of the festival to support people, and likewise Bardy and Stu at the One Mile Brewing Company who bring up comedians periodically as well. Those guys are providing the feeder for events like RAW Comedy for emerging comedians. For those of you who are uninitiated, the Melbourne International Comedy Festival's annual RAW Comedy event is Australia's largest and most celebrated open-mic competition.

It is super important we provide our constituents with the opportunity to be part of that. That is a segue to talking about opportunity, which is the serious part of the speech, if you like. The Darwin Entertainment Centre provides a pathway for artists of all types, not just professionals but also amateurs and community groups, with an opportunity and spaces for self-expression, which is just so important.

The Entertainment Centre is deeply committed to bringing vibrancy to our city year-round, and it is worth highlighting because the Darwin Entertainment Centre is yet another fixture of our landscape, but it is so easy to take for granted. Why? Because at its core, through art, culture, storytelling, theatre and music, the DEC plays its part to ensure that Darwin is indeed a great place to live, work and play.

DEC's programs are extremely diverse and inclusive and seek to bring in a plethora of options for our audiences to enjoy, ranging from music to circus and from dance to comedy. It is so much more than just a hall for hire; it is a place that boasts a music program, a family program, a creative learning program for schools to enrich the curriculum and inspire young people, plus a First Nations program featuring things like the Garrmalang Festival. Likewise, it supports our arts sector through partnerships with the Darwin Festival, Darwin Fringe Festival and artists in residence, including SLIDE Youth Dance Theatre, Gary Lang NT Dance Company and, of course, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra.

To quantify that contribution, just consider the following numbers. The Darwin Entertainment Centre welcomes over 78,000 attendees every year; employs over 9,000 artists and performers; educates more than 9,000 students and children through its programs; and supports some 23 community groups with access to stages and subsidies worth more than \$250,000. What then of those numbers is the return on investment?

A recent Darwin Entertainment Centre impact and evaluation study will tell you that 94% of the attendees at shows feel welcome, which is a great thing; that 95% of those attendees report having a really positive experience when they go; and that 82% of those respondents—this is an important one—would not have visited the area if the event they attended had not been held.

Think about that as a little footnote. We all bemoan the state of the CBD and the fact that it and the numbers are not what they used to be and that it is tough for small businesses to stay afloat in this climate. The Entertainment Centre is one of the drawcards that bring people into the city. Take note of this statistic: 87% of attendees spend money in the CBD when they come to attend a Darwin Entertainment Centre production. Those visits are extremely important. Some 41% of respondents in that same evaluation study noted that they would like to see more cultural events in Darwin.

We often talk in this place about competitive and strategic advantages and leveraging our opportunities. I reckon two of the ones that we could really make a lot more use of in terms of bang for buck, return on investment and what they contribute to not just our economy but also our society—the rich tapestry of everything, art, and dare I say it, food. If you want bang for buck the greatest return on investment and economic endeavour that this town runs is the Laksa Festival. It costs nothing to put on, everyone attends it and we all enjoy it. Obviously, my tummy is grumbling a bit and that is probably a bit of bias, but I think that we could do more to leverage our competitive advantage by thinking about what we can do in the arts space as well as in the food space.

A member: Hear, hear!

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you.

The sum total of that recent impact and evaluation study pointed out that every dollar of funding we spend in the Entertainment Centre space has a return on investment of \$9.83. That is a remarkable statistic. I freely admit that it is its own evaluation study, so it could be on the rosier side of things. Even so, the return on investment is undoubtedly high for what we do at the Entertainment Centre. It is an important institution to support to make sure it can continue to provide support to our wider community. Can you imagine what our city landscape would be like if we did not have an entertainment centre to host events?

I will be doing my part in my side hustle as a musician to make sure that we put on things at the Entertainment Centre when we can—and things that kids can access. The Entertainment Centre recently worked with community theatre groups that put on enormous productions like the *Mary Poppins* production, which I will come back to talk about at length because I have another 10 minutes to go on how excellent *Mary Poppins* was. I will hold off on that one for tonight. The point is that the Entertainment Centre is providing space and a suite of opportunities that are difficult to come by.

I thank the DEC board and the DEC team who worked incredibly hard to bring this festival to light and to activate our city in a new and exciting way. We talk about words like 'activation'. What does it take to activate a city? It takes the goodwill, hard work, cooperation and collaboration of people in our arts communities as well. They have been to some extent overlooked over a period of time. We have a thriving arts sector in the Northern Territory. It has always had a disproportionately high number of people involved for a place that has only 250,000 people across the entire Northern Territory.

I specifically thank Georgia Hendy, the recently appointed DEC CEO, who hails from Sydney and who has brought her family here to make a valuable contribution. She personally curated a lot of the Comedy Festival artists. I sat next to her at the Reuben Kaye show. The whole audience was clinging on desperately, waiting to see who would be offended and leave first. She had the right judgement to pick the right sort of comedian who would push the envelope and make it a spicy and entertaining event for everyone in every regard.

I also shout out to a special Fong Lim constituent, the DEC Chair, Hon Clare Martin AO, who graciously hosted and roasted me at a number of shows that I was able to attend.

I applaud the strategic planning of the CEO and the board. It is smart timing to put on a festival now as part of the festival circuit, allowing us to capitalise on the momentum elsewhere.

In closing, I wish the Darwin Comedy Festival and the Darwin Entertainment Centre every success. I look forward to this becoming a regular fixture in the Northern Territory arts calendar.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I will talk about a charity event that part of our CLP team is participating in at the moment: the March On Challenge. The dynamic team members who have gone in this event are the Members for Drysdale, Wanguri, Port Darwin and yours truly. We are doing a virtual walk of the Kokoda Track to raise money.

What is March On with Soldier On? I quote:

March On with Soldier On is a virtual walking challenge to raise funds to help prevent veteran suicide. It pays tribute to the sacrifices made by our brave soldiers in Kokoda in World War II, and highlighting the importance of needing to help our soldiers of today.

It is a worthy cause. The way it works is you sign up, try to get donors and then log your steps. You can choose to do either the 96 kilometres to Kokoda or, for my sins, I have tried to do the return one, which is about 196 kilometres. That is done within the month.

We are doing it as a team; we set a goal. We all put in a goal of what we would raise which was \$2,270. Collectively we have raised \$1,733 so far. I am happy to approach any member who wants to donate. It is open to everyone. I can send you the link. I am more than happy for the opposition and the Independents to come and join us, as well as any of our colleagues.

It is a good cause. It is challenging, particularly being the F-grade athlete that I am. I have clocked up 101 of the 192 kilometres I am supposed to do by the end of March. How the hell have I done that? You have to ask yourself, 'How can Brian do that?' I will tell you how. I cheat because I log my steps when I deliver my newsletter. Over the last couple of weeks I have visited over 1,000 houses in the Karama electorate. That is a lot of kilometres.

One action serves many purposes. I get out and connect with my constituents and residents. At the same time I am clocking kilometres to raise money. The wonderful constituents of Karama have also volunteered to donate money. I will relay the case of when I walked out of the Karama Shopping Plaza the other day. A guy, Tony, came up and said, 'Brian, are you walking the Kokoda Track?' I said, 'I'm not quite walking it. It is a virtual walk. We just log it.' I explained it to him. He said, 'I want to give you \$100'. I was about to go, and I said, 'The office is shut. I can send you a link and you can email it.' He said, 'No, I want to give it to you'.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

SCHOOL ATTENDANCE OFFICERS

THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

- resourcing schools appropriately so that they can offer engagement programs and initiatives that keep kids in schools
- putting communities at the forefront of decision-making for their children through local decision-making agreements such as the Groote Archipelago Local Decision Making Agreement.

Collaborative and community-driven solutions are needed to get Territory students engaged in our schools. On top of policies to help raise engagement and attendance in remote schools, the former Labor government invested in the education sector by negotiating and securing the \$1bn Better and Fairer School Agreement in partnership with the Australian Government to fully and fairly fund all the 153 public schools across the Northern Territory.

We provided \$40m towards on-country learning initiatives to boost attendance and engagement in all 46 Central Australia schools. We increased the Back to School vouchers for Territory families from \$50 to \$200. We reinstated and supported school-based police program across 13 NT Government schools, which was cut by the CLP Giles government, and we provided \$300,000 to every school for upgrades under the Building Better Schools program.

Those were some of the initiatives the former Labor government invested in because we know education is a critical component in ensuring all Territory kids have the skills and knowledge they need to get the best start in life.

Sanctions are a legitimate mechanism to encourage families to assist their children to attend school, but we must also differentiate between voluntary disengagement and non-attendance resulting from causes or factors outside of the child's or family's control. I look forward to seeing the CLP's policy in relation to this.

The CLP government and its minister for Education need to come up with a better plan for education that is not just about punishing families and forcing children and young people into classrooms without the right supports. This is why I echo my Labor team's position and oppose this Bill in its current form. It enshrines truancy officers into legislation and brings punitive measures in focus, further disadvantaging low-income families and Aboriginal children and families who live remotely.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, might I begin by congratulating you on your promotion to the Chair. You are the one member of the Assembly who I am seldom able to make eye contact with, and it is delightful to see your face in front of me for a change.

I reaffirm sentiments expressed by the Member for Port Darwin and thank the Member for Fannie Bay for sharing with us the benefit of her professional experience in the education sector. It is important to remember the experiences we have had outside this place and bring to bear the benefit of our wisdom and experiences, whether that be in the private or public sector and other organisations. We are lucky to have a diversity of opinions in this room and are blessed to have a respectful debate on these issues.

I hear a debate genuinely interrogating policy, which is a welcome development. It is important that we respectfully agree to disagree on things, and that is possible to do. One thing that none of us disagree about is the importance of education.

Education is the key to long-term futures for young people as well as society at large. There is, for once, no need for me to exhaustively cite the academic literature in respect of anything to do with the virtues of attending school.

I am fortunate to represent urban schools with extremely positive school attendance rates. I was recently at the school board meeting for Stuart Park Primary School, which is near and dear to me. I commend them on how successfully they encourage kids to come to school. Likewise, Haileybury Rendall School has fantastically positive school attendance rates. In both those places, the attendance rates are high for students of every disposition and background, including those who identify as an Indigenous cohort.

They are two fine and high-performing schools in urban areas. I take on board the points made by members of the Chamber that we need to provide incentives for people to want to attend school and make it an attractive place to be, making learning a positive experience.

It is my heartfelt belief that the Education minister is committed to making those things happen, but we are here today to discuss ...

Mrs Hersey: I am.

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you, minister. I believe with sincerity that you are committed to those aspirations.

I return to why we have risen today: to speak about a specific Bill with a specific remit. I will confine my remarks to reflecting on the remit of the Bill. Prior to doing so, I note that I was the beneficiary of the fantastic, high-quality public education in Darwin at five different primary and secondary schools. I am extremely grateful for that educational privilege and hope that future generations can benefit from educational opportunities, the likes of which I was afforded.

I will note in the same breath that, sadly, attendance figures at the school I attended are not what they once were. There is the rub; that is why we are having this discussion. How can we improve school attendance and reduce disengagement?

The proposed reform constitutes a clear measure by the government to encourage regular attendance in compulsory education and reduce disengagement. Enshrining the school attendance officer position in legislation will ensure the role of attendance officer is defined, which is also a positive development.

As the Member for Fannie Bay reflected, the ability for the Education department's CEO to now appoint authorised officers under the Act is maintained, and that reinforces a multifaceted system of support which factors in a range of roles, methods and tools that are required to address disengagement, truancy and absenteeism. The amendments, to my understanding, will make the issuing of infringement notices under the Act safer and more efficient, but not the de facto standard.

We reflected on the fact the national school identifier has been incorporated in this legislation, and I think it is an appropriate place for it to be included, contrary to what has been said previously. Updates to the regulations will ensure schools can collect the information required to support the national rollout of the school identifier, which will occur in 2027. Once implemented, the unique identifier will enable the tracking of students across jurisdictions and provide a safeguard for students at risk of disengagement from education.

These are the purported key aims and features of the Bill. I believe they are reasonable aspirations within the Bill's remit.

A charge was made that this Bill fails to address complexity. It may be the case that this Bill is unable to solve all problems in our education system. Fair enough; time will tell. However, I am happy to support an affirmative action by the Minister for Education and Training in this space. I am grateful for the fact that we are constructively making a move in a positive direction, and I am willing to give the Bill my support on that basis.

There were reflections in prior debate about carrot and stick. I am happy to be clear about this. I will not launch into talking about rights and responsibilities, political philosophy and John Locke, but I will say this: the balance has been lost on carrot and stick in lots of areas of civil society in the Northern Territory. That is why we see levels of social and economic dysfunction, the likes of which we have previously not been a party to. I do not think anyone in the government is contending that we are anything but a government that is committed to being tough on crime and will reaffirm that actions have consequences. The government is willing to stake its governance on the statement that we believe actions have consequences and that we need to restore the balance of carrot and stick.

Withholding welfare payments in isolation, indeed, may or may not strongly correlate with improving attendance. But let us be clear: this is not a measure in isolation; this measure of restoring a balance of rights and responsibilities is consistent with the totality of this government's legislative agenda to date. All that we have done here since October testifies to that fact.

School attendance officers alone may not be enough to improve the precarious state of public education. Good things are happening in public education. Good people work in public education. This government wants to support them and our young people in attending and enjoying school because educational futures are the key to uplifting our economic and social futures.

Even if school attendance officers are not a silver bullet at this juncture, on the advice I have on good authority, I believe that they may help.

On that basis, I commend this Bill to the Assembly.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DEBT CEILING REPEAL

THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I had not planned on saying anything in relation to this Bill in the interest of efficiency as much as anything else, but I am compelled to say a few things.

I thank my colleague, the Member for Blain. What he just contributed to the debate evidences that there are people on this side of the House thinking about economic vision, alternatives and possibilities. There is not an absence of a plan, but a contest of ideas regarding our economic future and how to go forward.

I particularly thank the Member for Johnston for her contribution. I appreciate that she has done a lot of homework in communicating what she has tonight. In large measure, I agree with many of the things she has to say. That is why I find it so difficult to vote for this Bill tonight because I worry that we will not restrain spending going forward.

I am equally mindful that this is not a position that my learned colleague the Treasurer asked to be put in. This is a position that we inherited from decades of particularly egregious fiscal mismanagement over the last eight years of Labor governance. I talked about mismanagement and overspending from day one in this House and articulated what has gone wrong where and how I think it could be addressed.

Whilst I enjoyed the Leader of the Opposition's remarks for their comedic value in the most part, they are historically revisionist. The fact is that the books have been ground into the ground on the basis of fiscal mismanagement and gross malice, ineptitude or negligence when it comes to our economic affairs over a long time.

As I have said from my maiden speech onwards, I am economically rational, fiscally conservative and socially liberal. Perhaps I am more fiscally conservative than some of my peers within the government. I recognise at this point that the choices have been made by the government not to pull the handbrake fast and depress consumer demand and spook the horses, as it were.

If the government were to make egregious cuts and not repeal the debt ceiling, it is inevitable that the government would have to hit it, report on it, and spending and borrowing might be curtailed and affected. I support my learned colleague the Treasurer in his effort not to spend our way out of the problem, but to continue to spend in the short run to soften the landing of bringing integrity back to our economic position.

It is wholly unreasonable for us to be in the situation we are in, where it is not half of our money that comes in revenue from the Commonwealth; it is more than three-quarters. Half of it is GST money; the other quarter is essentially grants money in different forms. We have to find ways, as I have said from day one, not to just spend money but also institutionally establish how to save it, stop the wastage of it and make it.

The threads of that narrative and the plan for how to coordinate that agenda are starting to come together. There is obviously clarity on this side of the House that improving our regulatory environment by deregulating our environment aggressively—that is what we have done in the small space now—will hopefully facilitate private investment growth. That may transpire. I hope it does, because at the moment that is our singular strategy for making money in the short run, to the best of anybody's knowledge.

That is not the only way to run an economy. There are active conversations held on this side in respect of all that. We need to give the Treasurer a little more credit than we are giving him. We have not spent six or seven months getting across this only to say, 'Maybe we will keep spending, and we will spend our way out of the problem'. There is more going on than that. It is important for us to call a spade a spade, along with some of the other discussions we are having where we need to be a little less floral and a little more dry about the details of the discussion.

It is important to understand that the fiscal position we are in is predominantly the consequence of the rapid deterioration of our debt position over the last decade.

I noted the Member for Karama saying 'dear, dear' in relation to the contention by the Member for Johnston that we would never be able to realise private investment in this place and that it would never dig us out of our financial hole.

That is not true, in my opinion. It will be very difficult, but it will not be impossible. In fact, it has been a common aspiration of multiple governments in the Northern Territory over decades to try to wean us off the public purse by growing private sector investment and enterprise. The reasons why that has not happened are

enumerate, but we must start somewhere with trying to entice and induce private investment back into this space.

We talk about the fact that the public and community sector is the largest contributor to the economy, but that is indicative of us having 27,000 public servants in a place with 250,000 people, which is also diminishing. That is an unsustainable mix in any case.

It is necessary for us to create a regulatory environment that will allow for private investment and to try to reintroduce confidence in the marketplace. That is essentially what the government is trying to do. I am not thrilled with the nomenclature, but when the Deputy Chief Minister says, 'Drill, baby, drill', I think what he is really saying, in his own way, is that we are pro sustainable resource development. If we could just realise this and go forward meaningfully ...

J Davis: That is a bit of a stretch.

Dr RAHMAN: I do not think so, because I am the one who has conversations with him at the end of the day. Both sides of this House have had a common aspiration over a long time to try to realise resource extraction, whether in natural gas or mining, so it is completely useless to sling mud on either side now about not wanting to own that agenda.

We have an abundance of sun and gas, and it would be prudent for us to make the best possible use of both whilst trying not to destroy our natural and built environment and maintaining our Territory lifestyle, which we all want to do. The place will not be worth a lick if we cannot live in it anymore, and we all know that.

I am veering off topic, and I do not want to give a speech like the Leader of the Opposition did.

I thank the Member for Johnston for bringing some numbers to this debate. It would have been a tragedy to have this debate without them.

I thank the Member for Blain for bringing an alternative economic vision to the debate, because it is important to understand vanity infrastructure spend is essentially on things that are shadeless shade structures. I seldom point to that one, but it is obviously the one that we can all understand as a stranded asset and a waste of time. Enabling and essential infrastructure are what we need to concentrate our efforts on with our limited resources when it comes to trying to create multiplier effects in economy at this stage. Conversations are being had on a regular basis about where we can best realise growth and where we should put our precious dollars.

I had not intended to speak on this, so I am not armed with facts and figures for once, but there is an economic vision. The strategy we employed broadly, which the Chief Minister announced this week, provides evidence of that. We have to be patient with a government that is less than eight months into its tenure—versus a government that was eight years into a run of fiscal mismanagement—to at least see where the cards fall and to give the government and the Treasurer the benefit of the doubt in that regard.

I believe we can realise private investment growth in this place, and I believe fiscal discipline will be required to do it. I believe our debt position is almost entirely the fault of the last Labor government, as I have said repeatedly in this place. While I am philosophically ill at ease with the idea of repealing a debt cap, I appreciate that at the moment it is about creating a short-run, smooth correction with the hope of providing better fiscal management, integrity and transparency into the future.

Mr YAN (Treasurer)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all members for their contributions to this debate.

When the Opposition Leader first got up and spoke about cop-outs, cover-ups and hiding, I thought she was talking about the Labor Party, certainly not about us. She said that the CLP has a lack of credibility in fiscal frameworks. I thought it was pretty rich to be questioning our credibility in the fiscal area. The Opposition Leader said that dollars matter; they do matter. I do not think they mattered to the previous Labor government because the reason we are here talking about the debt cap is the way that the previous Labor government spent money. Regarding fiscal integrity and accountability, I found it rich for the Opposition Leader to speak over and again about that. It just did not make any sense.

I will set the record straight on a couple of things. I noted the comments from the Member for Johnston. A lot of her contribution was about the previous Labor government and what it did with finances, which we now find ourselves in the position of having to deal.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

COMMONWEALTH DAY &
MARY POPPINS

THURSDAY 20 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, 10 March was Commonwealth Day and an opportunity to appreciate that we belong to a Commonwealth of Nations with shared history and aspirations. Although the event traces its origins to Empire Day, a day which was initially conceived to celebrate the British Empire, since the latter half of the 20th century the focus has shifted to emphasising the modern Commonwealth of Nations. The event was renamed Commonwealth Day in 1958, and its date moved to the second Monday in March in 1977.

Commonwealth Day is typically marked by a message made by the Head of State in the Commonwealth, as well as additional statements from the Commonwealth Secretary-General. There are interdenominational observances which are held in cities across the Commonwealth, including one held by the Head of the Commonwealth at Westminster Abbey, London.

I note the passing of the occasion today for three reasons of salience to this House. The first is that, at a time of shifting geopolitics and global uncertainty, it is worth reflecting on whom we actually share common values and commonality with and some of the positive forces that bind us together.

The second thing I note is that, notwithstanding the complexities of colonisation, it is worth appreciating, especially on a day when we have been espousing all the virtues of education, what a significant role the Commonwealth has and continues to play in education globally. I am personally extremely grateful for the educational opportunities I have been afforded by the Commonwealth over a range of years.

Thirdly, whilst the Commonwealth and the UK headquarters might feel extremely distant from us in Darwin, we all, more than most, belong to the Commonwealth in a direct way as members of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association.

The CPA has been relatively dormant in our polity for a number of years, but it is one of the oldest established organisations in the Commonwealth. It brings together members who are united by their respect for the rule of law, individual rights and freedoms and the pursuit of positive ideals for parliamentary democracy. It is something we should work together, as a parliament, to reinvigorate under the auspices of the Speaker.

The CPA is made up of almost 180 other legislative chambers and branches divided across nine geographic regions. We are a long way from the rest of Australia, but we are part of a broader fabric of democracy across the globe, and it behoves us to be part of it while we have the opportunity. There is a vast opportunity for parliamentarians and parliamentary staff to collaborate on issues of mutual interest and to share good practice.

I personally am learning an enormous amount from the CPA materials that we all have available to us. There are all sorts of information modules that are really instructive for the old and new parliamentarians amongst us. I note that today, whilst rushing past the lift, I found this flyer, 'Top 10 Tips for New Parliamentarians', amongst many other bits of material that I believe the CPA Headquarters Secretariat has been putting around to try to nudge us in the direction.

New and old parliamentarians would probably benefit from some of these ideas: don't panic; remember who you work for; seek advice; get prepared; specialise; set boundaries; keep it clean; build relationships; and read your standing orders—I imagine that would have been a useful one today for a number of us.

The theme of Commonwealth Day for 2025 was 'Together We Thrive'; that is the point. Commonwealth Day is an international harmony day, and just like the event we celebrated so enthusiastically yesterday and will officially celebrate again tomorrow, it is worth appreciating.

While we are in the neighbourhood of London and the CPA, I also wanted to shine a light on Darwin's recent production of *Mary Poppins*, which brought together a huge number of people who devoted six months to putting on an artistic production that was genuinely first rate and worthy of recognition. The amateur production made up of cast, crew and helpers of more than 100 sold out five shows at the Darwin Entertainment Centre. It was a long and intense production. Things like these are not just small Mickey Mouse things; they are high-quality productions that support the Darwin Entertainment Centre and bring people into the CBD who then spend in the city.

I was lucky to catch the final matinee show at which there was a packed room of kids who I could not believe kept it together for what was an excellent but pretty long show. It is a testament to the quality of the production that all those kids stayed engaged. Young and old appreciated the event.

I shout out the people who were involved in the production because they did not even get a mention in the *NT News* until after the five shows had sold out. That is the state of affairs and neglect when it comes to our arts sector, in my opinion. I have spoken several times about the fact that we punch above our weight class in putting on artistic productions and having a disproportionate number of people involved in visual art, music, dance and theatre. This is the stuff that makes us money, whereas a lot of other stuff does not make us much at all. It is worth getting behind our arts sector because it is a growth sector that, alongside other industries we are looking to champion, can help us move forward and prosper economically and socially.

To the creative team of Cat Hart, director; Michael Loughlin, musical director; Abigail Hatton, choreographer; Sally Bevis in wardrobe; Tomm Lydiard in lighting design; and Chris Kluge in sound design, well done on your hard work.

The stage and technical crew, who are often neglected, built amazing sets. They are Annette Gore; Mary Verus; Michael Bradtke; Madeline Jarvis; Chris Kluge; Tully Gelfing; Daniel Gore; Mahli Seden; Angel Aquino; Debbie Barnett; Allie Kendall; Swahnnya De Almeida; Michael Gore; and Oliver Jarvis.

The set maintenance and construction and costume teams do the hard work behind the scenes that no-one notices but makes the whole thing hang together. They are Chris Kluge; Daniel Gore; Ben Hall; Michael Gore; Mitchell Strzelecki; Resy van Beek; Annette Gore; Martin Gore; Cat Hart; Glen Jarvis; Sally Bevis; Yvonne Corby; and Jacqui Saunders. Thank you for all your hard work.

Those were the people behind the scenes, which gives you a scale for the number of people who are involved in putting on something that large. It is not just about a few posters at the last minute; it is six months of tireless effort from people.

The orchestra is Benjamin Bradtke; James Teh; JC John Collins; David Smith; Amy Zhao; Sam Harrison; Bruce Cartwright; Joel Hoare; David Pye; Craig McGiffen; Matt Holt; Oliver Locos; David Chin; Jenny Hodgkinson; Tania Watts; and Michael Bardon. Thank you so much for giving up your time to perform in a high-quality musical from a difficult book.

Thank you to the ensemble who did the hard work shoe-shuffling on the stage: Ben Hall; Patrik Ralph; Harry Walker; Glen Jarvis; Justin Dela; Vega-Dela Pena; Fuakava Hatch; Liz Keith; Andrew Edwards; Chris Obst; Ludo Harrison; Lyndelle Barry; Helen Nenke; Sarah Cullinan; and Cameron Wieck.

To the main cast, it is an enormous amount of work being involved in a production like this, learning all the lines, giving up your time whilst holding down a full-time job and doing it for free to share and make the Territory a better, liveable place that has lifestyle options where you can watch *Mary Poppins* and go shooting, fishing, hunting and drag racing. These things are important in their own right. To Kamaron Arthur; Martin Gore; Rachel Wharam; Lina Zhao; Jonathan Bradtke; Lily Daniel; Jett Hutton; Fiona Wake; Yolande Davidge; and Resy van Beek, thank you so much for your efforts. Yolande Davidge recently underwent a medical procedure, and I wish her all the very best in her recovery.

Finally, I would be remiss not to single out Mary Poppins herself. Hannah Clark, who played Mary Poppins with such grace and poise, really deserves a shout-out as a class performer. When Hannah Clark is not busy entertaining children as Mary Poppins, she is Captain Starlight at the hospital—that is who she is. She is the one cheering up all those sick kids in the hospital and then in her down time, doing it on stage with her voice.

It is not a small enterprise putting on something like this. Thousands of Territorians benefited from being a part of it. I commend the production to the Assembly.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, apologies in advance for a bit of a shift in tone. Just a forewarning that my adjournment will be heavy in nature and may be upsetting for some people to hear.

I feel that with my platform comes enormous responsibility to speak out for the voices who are often muted. After our epic night on Tuesday, I got home at 2 am. Unable to sleep, I jumped online to Instagram to be confronted with the images of dead and dying children—I am sorry; I know this is unprofessional, but I am just a normal person, not a career politician—from the latest indiscriminate Israeli bombing of civilians in Gaza. It was such a wrenching feeling to have been so swallowed up in an incredibly intense night here with all the pettiness, hostility and outright lies that happen in this Chamber, which can feel like the whole world, for that to then be shattered by being instantly transported to the refugee tents of families in Gaza.

As I lay in bed, my 15-month-old baby lay sleeping peacefully next to me, I saw images of little Palestinian babies mutilated, their feet poking out of the rubble. On Tuesday night this week, Israel broke the ceasefire



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

GRANT TAMBLING AM

TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mrs ZIO (Fannie Bay): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to Hon Grant Ernest John Tambling AM, who passed away on 24 January 2025. Although I did not have the opportunity to get to know Grant personally, we all acknowledge that he was a dedicated man of service who made significant contributions to the Northern Territory and Australia throughout his long career.

Grant was also a husband, father, grandfather and a friend to many. From what people have told me, Grant was known by all who met him as an absolute gentleman. He served as the Member for Fannie Bay in the first Northern Territory's Legislative Assembly from 1974 to 1977, paving the way for those who followed in his footsteps, including me.

Grant's achievements demonstrate his lifelong commitment to the development and governance of the Northern Territory, for which he continued to advocate throughout his political career. As the current Member for Fannie Bay, I am honoured to continue the legacy of service that Grant Tambling began in the electorate. His commitment to our community and his tireless advocacy for the Northern Territory serves as an inspiration to all of us in public office.

Grant Tambling's passion for the development and progress of the Northern Territory was evident throughout his career. He held executive responsibilities for Community Development, Finance and Local Government during his time in the Legislative Assembly. His work laid the foundation for the growth and prosperity we see in Fannie Bay and across the Territory.

As we remember Grant Tambling's contributions to his family, I pledge to carry forward his spirit of dedication to our community. I will do this by working tirelessly to ensure that Fannie Bay remains safe, secure and thriving. Grant's legacy reminds us of the impact that one person can have on their community and their nation. As the Member for Fannie Bay, and as I am sure that Grant would have, I will remain engaged in community services and focus on issues that are important to Territorians.

Grant was known for his fierce advocacy and willingness to challenge ideology. He was a strong advocate for all his constituents and for the Territory as a whole. I am sure that I speak on the behalf of everyone in the Chamber when I say that we sincerely thank Grant Tambling for his service. Even more so, we thank his family for giving him to the NT and allowing him to do what he loved. The NT is a better place for having Grant Tambling as a part of its history.

I place on my record my appreciation of Grant's long and meritorious public service and tender my profound sympathy to his family in their bereavement.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, thank you to everyone in the House for the opportunity to speak today, and thank you to everyone in the gallery who is joining us tonight for the opportunity to share in this occasion.

I speak in memory of Grant Tambling AM. As we have heard around the House, Grant served as an alderman with Darwin City Council from 1972 to 1974, before being elected to the first Territory Assembly from 1974 to 1977 as the Member for Fannie Bay. He then became the deputy leader of the CLP for two years before moving to the House of Representatives for four years, and he then moved again to Canberra in 1987 until 2001 as a senator. He served in all three levels of government, plus as an Administrator in Norfolk Island between 2003 and 2007. Goodness me!

Tonight I will not detail his long list of services and offices, as others have already done so exhaustively. I will spare us another one of those. Instead, I will provide a couple of brief personal reflections, because I had the opportunity to know him a little over time. I want to draw on two things: his generosity, and his intellectual depth.

Politicians are busy people, and in the time that Grant served he was often representing even more constituents than some of us. But even with a larger number of people to represent, he always made time for others. That is a common refrain, I have found. He made time to go out bush and be in the city. He made time. Indeed, he made time for me as well. He helped me enormously with some of my early career research.

I remember visiting Grant and Sandy in their apartment in the Sentinel building, and I remember interviewing him on the balcony, many times over, for the first major piece of research I did about welfare reform in north Australia. It was something he was very passionate about as well because he was a parliamentary secretary involved in that area for an awfully long time. The depth of his knowledge was profound, and he was always extremely generous with sharing his insights and his connections, which were very helpful when I needed interviews with people who otherwise would not open doors for me. He was generous in that regard and a loyal CLP stalwart for years—for decades, in fact.

It is worth remembering that he was genuinely committed to bipartisan cooperation for the benefit of Territorians in a way that few Territory representatives have been, and he is to be commended for that. I was reminded of this fact by Sandy just the other day. She kindly spoke to me at an International Women's Day event. We were talking about the fact that Grant took the time to get out and about in the bush, and it teased out the idea that this partly happened because he and some of his colleagues fought for better terms and conditions to be able to represent the Northern Territory.

I wanted to take Sandy up on that point, so I hunted down former Senator Trish Crossin—who crossed over with Grant Tambling for a term—to get some of her reflections and find out how much of that was real. I am grateful to former Senator Crossin for sharing some generous reflections. She pointed out that by the time she got to the Senate, Grant was a real stalwart; he had been there for a long time, and he was a senior figure. Despite all of that, he was extremely generous in offering counsel and guidance to somebody from the opposing party, no less, in Canberra, because they shared a common interest in fighting the Territory's corner. Down in Canberra, it was the two of them against the rest of them, as he saw it.

I was told by former Senator Crossin that Grant used to maintain a spreadsheet of issues relevant to the Territory across all the federal portfolios. Can you imagine if you were new to the Senate and relatively clueless, having been parachuted in, having to come in and try to be across all of that? He used to share that information so they could champion ideas. Sometimes, even when they were not ideas that he could champion, he would feed them off to her so she could do something with it. He was a skilful politician.

Speaking to that remote engagement, they worked together on some practical nuts and bolts stuff, like vehicle access to get out bush and work the city. I note today that our Chief Minister had to fight our corner with the Remuneration Tribunal, and they did the same thing in Canberra to try to get some of their air charter entitlement turned into a vehicle allowance so they could get out bush more often. It was a time of bipartisan cooperation in the background.

Former Senator Crossin also shared that Grant did extensive work on copyright vis-a-vis Indigenous art. Again, that was research shared, and it continues to affect our landscape to this day. One of her final observations was in relation to her own maiden speech. At the end of it, Senator Tambling came over and said, 'It was a great speech; well done, but just quietly, you might have said something about the Katherine floods.'

Senator Crossin, at the time did not know what to make of it, but then got advice from Senator Tambling that she could still make up for it by speaking about it in a special adjournment. She had to query what a special adjournment was. He was extremely generous across the board in that regard; that is worth reflecting on.

They got into a bit of trouble. They had such a collegiate relationship that there were some incidents when they alternated images of one another stuck to one side of the House or the other, trying to goad each other into voting for things they were not allowed to vote for. Perhaps it is a tactic we should start employing around here. Her key observation at the end of it all was that Grant Tambling 'never played the person, only the ball'. I think that is testament to his character.

Another thing I want to reflect on is his depth. Politicians are increasingly lightweight in the modern era when committing their ideas to paper. It is too difficult, too risky and you get caught out. Grant Tambling was somebody who did not shy away from putting his thoughts out in the public domain to be tested.

I was the beneficiary of some of his work. I dug out a couple of things he gave me that, honestly, I am still referring to even to this day.

In his capacity as shadow minister for Regional Development, External Territories and North Australia, he wrote discussion papers that tackled big issues like social security, welfare and poverty in north Australia. These are reports from the 1990s. It is interesting that some of the things they go through are still pertinent to us today. There is lots to be learned; there is wisdom to be gained from these documents that he, his staff and his office worked on.

They engaged with tax reform; Commonwealth Grants Commission models and whether they are fair; contributors to poverty; the high cost of service delivery in the Northern Territory; remote tax allowances; zone tax allowances; and even truancy and non-attendance at schools. Issues concerning Aboriginal people and Aboriginal poverty were also forefront in his mind, and he did not shy away from committing his thoughts and ideas to paper. He was a man of conviction.

Probably my favourite quote of his that I have is in this discussion paper from what used to be called the North Australian Research Unit based at the Australian National University. This is from the 1998 discussion

paper 11, 'A Social Policy Research Agenda to take the Territory, and the Nation, into the 21st Century'. It is a comprehensive paper written. It is worth reflecting on when we think about some of the things that we do in this House, because if we are not mindful of what people have done in the past, we are doomed to repeat mistakes.

There are a couple of quotes I want to draw out, because they are worth mentioning. The first is:

The unique characteristics of the Northern Territory—with high Aboriginal and ethnic population components—demand constant testing of needs and equity matters.

We are still fighting that fight all this time later. It is worth remembering that we stand on the shoulders of giants in building some of these arguments to prosecute our arguments better with the federal government—all the more worth remembering on a night when the federal budget is being released.

Here is another quote I drew out of this paper. In his opinion:

It is our role as politicians, academics, policy advisers, bureaucrats and leaders to ensure that we develop social policy that is adaptable and flexible enough to meet the demands of our changing world and region. We must address the needs of all in our policies and in doing so ensure effective and efficient service delivery.

A final quote I want to draw out of here is about the gravity of his role:

I do not take lightly my responsibility as a Federal Senator. It saddens me to see the politics of division that is being practised by the One Nation Party. Pauline Hanson and her advisers are showing a total lack of social responsibility by promoting a return to economic and social policies which would see Australia quickly attain the status of a world pariah and make the prospect of Paul Keating's banana republic look positively cheery.

Grant Tambling was a heavyweight. More than just being a skilful politician, he was a true parliamentarian and a servant of the public in the truest sense. He was a man of principle, conviction and sincere dedication to the Northern Territory.

I offer my sincere condolences to Sandy, Coryn, Amalia, Reuben, Hamish and Castiella. Verily to God we belong, and to Him we shall return.

Vale, Grant Tambling.

Madam SPEAKER: I also extend my deepest condolences to the family and friends of Hon Grant Tambling.

Motion agreed to.

Members stood for one minute's silence as a sign of respect.

Madam SPEAKER: I thank honourable members for their contributions to this evening's motion. Light refreshments are available in the Main Hall for the family and friends.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE **Investment in Healthcare**

Continued from earlier this day.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker; I extend my condolences to Grant Tambling's family. He was a fantastic champion of the Territory. If we can follow in his footsteps we will be doing very well.

The matter of public importance asks that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare meets the current and projected needs of all Territorians. I think I speak on behalf of the whole Assembly, because we have a number of things in common, when I say that we all want a first-class health system to serve all Territorians. I believe we all want well-staffed hospitals and healthcare facilities; the Territory to be a place where health professionals want to come to work and live, rather than leave; short waiting times; and, noting that my son is a paramedic, to reduce the need for ramping services to support our hospitals. I think we all have the same aspiration.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

INVESTMENT IN HEALTHCARE

TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

disease and mental health challenges, will face even greater burdens as these health impacts begin to manifest.

Beyond the direct health risks, the environmental consequences of oil and gas extraction are also of great concern. Contamination of water sources, disruption of local ecosystems and the destruction of wildlife habitats could exacerbate the already significant pressures on our environment and communities.

If our commitment is to continue to improve health outcomes we must ensure that we are not trading one set of health risks for another. The Northern Territory cannot afford to ignore the mounting evidence of these health risks.

The health challenges we face in the Northern Territory are not insurmountable, but they require a united effort. We must continue to advocate for better healthcare services, chronic disease prevention, mental health services and programs that break the cycle of disadvantage. We must also protect our environment from industries that threaten to harm our land, air and water and the health of the people who call this place home. Let us make health our priority because our communities deserve nothing less.

I seek leave to table this report.

Leave granted.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, 'that the NT Government ensures its investment in healthcare means current and future projected needs of all Territorians'—that is indeed a matter of public importance, and I welcome the opposition raising it, but there is something of a perverse irony that the Labor opposition would raise it, noting its chronic lack of investment in the healthcare system over large tracts of time. I can only imagine that those opposite have raised it today serendipitously hoping to capitalise on the federal budget and announcements that may paper over their negligent conduct in this area.

Investment is about more than just buildings; it is also about people, and that is where the last eight years of Labor government was abysmal. I specifically want to talk about a durable healthcare workforce, which I have raised before in other forms. I am astonished that this is the item the opposition chooses to draw attention to because, as the Minister for Health pointed out, we are working aggressively and at pace in this space to do all manner of things that Labor dropped the ball on over a long time. I am not ordinarily predisposed to playing 'kick the last lot for the last eight years', but this is taking the prize today.

In the relentless pursuit for financial capital over the last eight years the Labor government dropped the ball on human capital, and I have raised this point before. In the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report (TAFR) that came out late last year, if you look carefully you will see that health is the government sector's largest expenditure category. It is ideally illustrative of the Labor government's mismanagement. The TAFR reiterates, as did the Minister for Health, that there has been:

... increased expenditure relating to: hospital services largely driven by skilled workforce shortages requiring increased utilisation of high cost agency labour hire and overtime ...

Why has that happened? Why is our system bankrupting itself by having to rely on a two-tier system where we are paying differential rates and having to rely on agency workforce to keep the system from collapsing? It is because of poor economic policy choices that have been made over time. While I applaud the federal Labor government for kicking in from time to time in our healthcare arena, and likewise federal Liberal governments, there is little that Territory Labor can lay credit to over the last eight years in that regard.

We have facilities that are underserved with an inadequate workforce to provide high-quality healthcare, and it is a disincentive for people setting up shop and sticking around in the Northern Territory. That is the point that the Minister for Health made. We are working on these issues holistically. Yes, there is a component about buildings, plant and capital, but there is also a component about making this place liveable and making it safe for the healthcare workforce, not just attracting healthcare workers but also finding ways to retain them. I am astonished in this regard.

The quantum of that utilisation of high-cost agency labour hire and overtime was:

health spending increased by \$228 million from \$2.02 billion in 2022–23 to \$2.24 billion in 2023–24, as a result of increased expenditure in hospitals, largely driven by skilled workforce shortages requiring increased utilisation of high cost agency labour hire and overtime ...

It is astonishing that those opposite would draw attention to this area of policy ineptitude. Successive Territory Labor Treasurers and Health ministers neglected this issue because, quite frankly, it was in the too-hard basket. This is not in the too-hard basket for this government.

You will note that when Labor refused to talk about population decline, we have tackled it from day one. It is just the beginning in this regard. At the moment, we are trying to stimulate the residential construction sector and housing supply and incentivise small business to spend money. All these things are working in tandem to try to create the preconditions for a place where people want to stick around.

It is not only us who have a healthcare worker shortage; there is a global shortage of healthcare workers, as the Deputy Opposition Leader pointed out. In order to be competitive in the marketplace you have to provide a reasonable offering. We are trying hard to set the preconditions to make it possible for people to want to come, stay and succeed here, because that is simply not the case now.

I am committed to working with the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the Minister for Health on creating sustainable, new workforce pipelines in healthcare. I say 'new' because we have had so many mis-starts, false alarms, red herrings and *Utopia*-esque announcements in this place that it is embarrassing.

You can go back to September 2023 to find the last lot of pseudo-engagement done by the then Deputy Chief Minister on a mercy mission to Kerala in India to try to set up new workforce pipelines with nurses, purportedly, and create aviation sector options. Where are those nurses? What do we have to show for that MOU with Kerala? It is astonishing that those opposite would raise this of all things.

I will give the Labor opposition a fairer hearing than anyone in this place. There are things Labor members could point to that they did successfully. Why not talk about them? Perhaps those opposite are being extremely brave to highlight how negligent they were in the policy arena in relation to workforce development over such a long period. I am not inclined to speak on matters of public importance, but this is so important that I had to speak on it.

I am committed, as I said, to working with the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the Minister for Health on creating sustainable, new workforce pipelines. Where Labor failed to do anything other than make *Utopia*-esque announcements, we will deliver. Just because you cannot see it does not mean there are not things happening in the background in a range of areas.

Yes, the headline-grabbing material is all about deregulating our environment and trying to create business confidence. I am the first to admit that the government is pushing an aggressive agenda in that regard, but it is not the only part of the agenda that we are pushing. There is a threefold agenda to try to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore lifestyle. Under those, lots of different things are happening in every regard. Whether they all work perfectly or at the same time remains to be seen.

Quite seriously, after years of negligence in workforce, population, talent acquisition, migration and higher education, what does the former government have to stand on in this regard? It dropped the ball entirely on the labour component of the Labor equation. It astonishes me that it was this fixated over this period on major projects and infrastructure.

The underlying problem is demographic decline. I have spoken about this at length, so I will not go through it again. The key thing to remember is that demographic decline has workforce implications. Good luck servicing any industry if you do not have people. That is why we are working on trying to bring people here and creating the preconditions for people to come, stay, live and work here. The healthcare workforce is an important part of that equation.

Our demographic decline has undermined, not fostered, economic development. It has an attendant impact on the quality of life for all Territorians. It has diminished it, not improved it. Demographic decline is at the root of the workforce crisis in healthcare. Be clear that is exactly what it is: a workforce crisis in healthcare.

I want to be careful about what I say because the people in our healthcare system are working as hard as they possibly can to provide the best quality of care they can, but they are working with the policy odds stacked against them, and they have been for a number of years now.

It is serendipitous that just yesterday one of my constituents, a gentleman I know named Sijmen Grunbauer, in desperation wrote a letter to the NT Independent. I highlight this letter because it speaks volumes about the situation we are in. The letter is titled 'Stroke victim left in limbo at RDH with no rehab services'. I had

been trying to help Sijmen Grunbauer to the best of my ability because his wife, Elva, recently had a stroke. She received care at RDH and has been redirected to palliative care. It is Sijmen's contention that she should have the option for rehabilitative care.

I know the people in RDH are doing their darnedest to provide the best possible service they can, but the contention made by my constituent is:

It seems that RDH does not have the expertise or staff to deal with any but the mildest form of stroke and therefore send the rest of us to die regardless of age.

That is a harsh charge. But what I will say is this: RDH does not have facilities for mechanical thrombectomy or specialist stroke physicians; RDH has a limited number of neurologists, and those who are there work overtime and flat out to try to keep up with demand. They are not to be pilloried for their service; they are to be lauded. The people who are to be pilloried for their negligence are the former government members who did not do anything to incentivise those specialists to come to and stay in the Northern Territory. They did not have transitional mechanisms in place to fill the gaps when we lost critical specialists and were unable to get people to fill those gaps.

I feel for Sijmen because there is little I can do for him or his wife, Elva, at this point, short of advocating for access to the rehabilitative care they are seeking at Palmerston hospital. That is a medical decision, and it will be made by medical specialists. Stroke is a perfect illustration of something that requires people with high-end skills and not after the fact, but at the time of the incident and the onset.

I struggle to see why we would be discussing this, except because it is worth shining a light on. Perhaps that is what we take from today. When all is said and done Labor's commitment to facing the NT's economic reality—which is a quagmire of catastrophe of its own creation—is something we are just starting to have to accept. Our government will make lots of noise about negligent conduct and economic mismanagement going forward, but people's lives are at stake in the bush and urban areas; this matters. All browbeating aside, all of us want a better, stronger, robust healthcare system.

I grew up here when investment in public health, housing, education and infrastructure was sufficiently strong to provide the preconditions for people to succeed. Successive governments over a number of years have dropped the ball. That process accelerated over the last eight years when we stopped paying attention to sustainable demographic growth to underpin sustainable economic growth.

I make the case frequently to my colleagues on the government side that it is great they have these industries that they want to concentrate on, but we will need people to fill all of them. That is what we are trying to do. We are making this a place where people across those sectors will want to live, work and enduringly stay here. People in critical areas like healthcare will want to do the same.

Remember that investment is not just about plant and capital, bricks and mortar or buildings and hospitals; it is about people. We all share concern for the state of our healthcare system. It is one of those things we need to band together on and face the reality so that we can move forward constructively. Unless and until we accept that we have a population and workforce problem—unless we can find some sort of bipartisan consensus on moving forward with that agenda, accepting that both sides dropped the ball on this over a number of years and now we need to figure out how to attract, retain and develop populations—the Northern Territory will be at a crossroads. Our economic development is not the only thing at stake; it is our existence and our capacity to exist rather than just subsist within this jurisdiction.

We cannot continue to joke, 'When in pain get on a plane'. Those days are done now. We know that there are critical issues in the healthcare sector, and it is time for us to face them head on. I commend the Minister for Health for facing those challenges and investing in our system appropriately.

Mr BROWN (Arafura): Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak on this matter of importance for all Territorians; that is, ensuring our healthcare investment meets the current and future needs of our communities, no matter where they are in the Territory.

Health is not just another policy area; it is central to positive outcomes, particularly out bush. Good health is the foundation for good families, happy communities, economic productivity and, indeed, the Territory's collective future. This is why it is vital that the Northern Territory Government commits to not only maintaining but also enhancing its investment in healthcare infrastructure, staffing and services.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DARWIN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

TUESDAY 25 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

As we talked to people, we developed a new idea for our Easter egg hunt this year. We will have a scavenger hunt to identify local birds in exchange for Easter eggs. Yes, I promise they will be chocolate, and people will get them at the end in a little nest. We are partnering with two of our amazing local organisations, BirdLife Top End and Rapid Creek Landcare. Atticus, a wonderful 13-year-old artist and a keen bird lover has drawn wonderful local birds for our bird hunt. Rapid Creek Landcare Group will celebrate our local flora and fauna and help people learn all about the environment we live in and depend on.

I cannot wait for this fun community event, bringing people together, celebrating and enjoying the wonderful Water Gardens that we are so lucky to have in Johnston, and bringing together organisations that connect our community with our electorate's beautiful, natural and unique environment.

Our community Easter Egg Hunt will take place in the Jingili Water Gardens on Thursday 17 April, and we extend the invitation to people from beyond Johnston to visit the most fun electorate in the Northern Territory.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, let me begin by congratulating you on your promotion and ascent to the Speakership, albeit temporarily.

This past Saturday I had the pleasure of representing the Minister for Arts at the Darwin Symphony Orchestra's 2025 inaugural season opening concert, *Romance and Revolution*. It was an extraordinary performance of three works, *The Chairman Dances* by John Adams, excerpts from Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* and Brahms' *First Symphony*.

It is a privilege to hear such high-quality concert programming in Darwin, and it is something that a lot of us take for granted. I note that the performance was supported by the arrival of a new concertmaster, and a series of new principals. For the uninitiated amongst you, that is 10 high-calibre musicians who have moved to Darwin from all over the country to take up professional paid chairs in the orchestra to improve the orchestra and help it to grow. Welcome to those new section principals and the concertmaster; I hope that you will be with us for a long time and enjoy your stay.

For the first time in a decade the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is going on tour through the Territory and taking music back to the people. It is worth remembering exactly what this institution represents for the Northern Territory.

Mrs Hersey: Hear, hear!

Dr RAHMAN: Member for Katherine, I take your interjection. On Tuesday 8 April the Darwin Symphony Orchestra will be performing at the arts and culture centre in Katherine.

On Thursday 10 April the orchestra will perform in Tennant Creek. Member for Barkly, you will be delighted to hear that, as I know what an avid lover of classical musical you are.

Member for Braittling, on Saturday 12 April the orchestra will perform in Alice Springs at the Desert Park in association with Parrtjima—A Festival in Light. The open-air orchestral performance will be set against the ancient MacDonnell Ranges. It is a program that is worth celebrating. In addition, there will be a DSO deconstructed chamber music concert on Saturday 13 April at the Araluen Arts Centre.

Notwithstanding the professionalism that I alluded to and the new hires that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has brought on board, it is important to recognise that this is an orchestra of the people. It is an orchestra for the people with deep community roots. The orchestra's story goes back a long way. In order to get an accurate picture of how far back it goes, I got in touch recently with Darwin's original maestro, Professor Martin Jarvis OAM, who was kind enough to share with me some of his reflections on the orchestra.

A symphony orchestra for the Northern Territory was high on the agenda of Chief Minister Paul Everingham, according to Daryl Manzie—all the way back then. Every state at the time had its own federally funded orchestra via what was then called the Australian Broadcasting Commission. It was something of a status symbol; every other capital had an orchestra, and the government wanted us to have one as well.

There were so many music lovers in that CLP government that at one point it even considered self-funding it when the Australian Broadcasting Commission rejected the offer to fund an orchestra in-house. However, the government realised that it would be cheaper to charter airbuses and commute everybody from here to Sydney Symphony Orchestra concerts in the Opera House than it would be to fund a homegrown Northern Territory orchestra. Therefore, it remained an objective, or maybe a dream, for a long time for a number of people in the Northern Territory to have that kind of ensemble and artistic outlet.

It was not easy, but that dream was realised over many years, and it was by the dedication and devotion of many people in the community who have performed for the love of music and sharing it with others. When federal funding was finally achieved in 2005 it became the first and still is the only non-professional orchestra in Australia that is centrally funded by the ABC. Since its inception in 1989 it has been an extremely high-profile orchestra; it has garnered a lot of media attention and exposure because it has such a unique status and reputation.

Some of you may not be aware, but the Darwin Symphony Orchestra over the years has performed in locations like Katherine Gorge, literally floating on pontoons; in Gove in the Member for Mulka's electorate; at Nourlangie Rock; on Groote Eylandt; in the Todd riverbed in Alice Springs; in front of the escarpment at Glen Helen Gorge in the West MacDonnell Ranges; and in Borroloola in the Gulf country.

The Darwin Symphony Orchestra is a cultural institution. It is not a bit of elitist nonsense that goes on in the Entertainment Centre; it is an orchestra for the people, and it has been making music for the benefit of the Northern Territory for a long time.

The roots of it go back a long way. It has been a 50-year gradual evolution since the 1970s when we had a Darwin Chamber Orchestra which gradually led to in 1983 the Darwin String Ensemble and in 1984 the first performance as the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, but it was a one-off performance at the time. I located some of the letters written at the time by then Chief Minister Ian Tuxworth who wrote individually to every member of the orchestra to thank them for bringing this important marker to our city, which is a city on the rise. That first concert combined the Darwin City Brass Band, the concert band, the string orchestra plus members of the Youth Orchestra, and it had to be held at the Marrara Indoor Stadium because there was nowhere for an orchestra to make that kind of music at the time.

The project to build the Darwin Performing Arts Centre was led by Tom Pauling QC at the time. He later went on to become the Administrator of the Northern Territory. When the soft opening for the DPAC was finally held on 3 and 4 May 1986, it was the Darwin Symphony Orchestra that provided the entertainment.

The permanent Darwin Symphony Orchestra was re-established from 1988 onwards. It was based on the Darwin Chamber Orchestra and its partner in crime, the Darwin Chorale, finally moving towards us having a fully-fledged orchestra. From June 1989 we finally had the Darwin Symphony Orchestra the likes of which we now regularly see.

That is a crude history of that institution. I am reliably informed that Professor Martin Jarvis at CDU has a book in the works in which he will talk about the evolution of that organisation over time. I very much look forward to reading it when the time comes. You can expect some other interesting stories in that book. It is worth marvelling at the orchestra's association with the Kangaroo 1989 Military Tattoo and the Katherine Gorge floating pontoons. Can you imagine an orchestra playing *Bolero* on floating pontoons?

Mrs Hersey: Amazing.

Dr RAHMAN: I take the interjection; the Member for Katherine was there.

If any of you have not seen it, the ABC documentary *Have Orchestra Will Travel* is hilarious and worth watching for one of the tours, which I think was run in the mid-1990s.

I draw attention to the longstanding beneficial association that the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has with Charles Darwin University. In fact, it is so longstanding that it predates Charles Darwin University, going back to the Northern Territory University and the Darwin Institute of Technology. I hope that partnership will endure because the university is richer for having the orchestra based there, providing another outlet and hive of activity in that place.

Whilst quirky and parochial, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is truly Territorian and for the community. It is not the London Symphony Orchestra, and it does not purport to be, but it performs music of a really high standard, is increasingly professional and, most importantly, maintains a commitment to making music for the people. We are lucky to have it.

Fellow members of the Assembly, I encourage you all to please support the orchestra in its upcoming endeavours. If you have occasion to see the Darwin Symphony Orchestra in Katherine, Tennant Creek or Alice Springs—those of you in bush electorates—please make the time to go and support the orchestra. The work it does is for the good of the community. It offers something unique to our landscape in terms of contributing to our lifestyle across the spectrum.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT &
INFRASTRUCTURE

WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Not necessarily.

Mr PAECH: Investment is happening in number of remote communities. There have been partnerships in the past. I encourage the telecommunications minister—I cannot remember who it is. There was a program previously with the federal government and Telstra because a few communities still need telecommunications turned on. It is important for safety and for them to participate in the economy and sell goods through arts; everyone loves a bit of online shopping. We should be supporting local businesses so we should continue to do that. You can buy a lot of goods over the internet and support local businesses.

Sports carnivals are also important. When remote communities have footy or softball events, they bring money to those remote communities and help the shops and arts centres. Indigenous rangers are a great investment, creating real jobs. A number are being rolled out in the Territory. Remote housing is also important. It is great to see continuing investment; that was a bipartisan commitment with ongoing investment. Any opportunity to grow the workforce in those communities is good.

What is meaningful? I can speak about this since I have an extension of time. Training opportunities for remote Aboriginal Territorians are important, but they have to be meaningful. My family lives in remote communities; I am a proud Aboriginal person. The disappointing thing I have seen over many years—I am not blaming anyone politically, because we all have something to answer for in this sense—is that so many of my family members have enough qualifications and certificates to wallpaper their houses, but they have not been awarded the opportunity to engage in meaningful employment or training and practice.

There is a lot of work to do. I appreciate the commitment of Charles Darwin University, which does a fantastic job. I am excited about the projects it is rolling out with VET programs in building, carpentry, electrical work and job-readiness. It helps a long way in seeing investment.

There are lots of conversations happening tonight. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge that Tourism Central Australia has an amazing campaign at the moment called Love Letters to Mparntwe/Alice Springs to celebrate the beauty of the place, whether it is the landscape, the culture or the people. It allows us to showcase that. Yes, Alice Springs has had a bad rap over a number of years. I acknowledge the Member for Fannie Bay grew up in Alice Springs—very proud.

There is so much to celebrate in Alice Springs. It is a beautiful place and land of magic, and if we continue to support tourism operators and showcase and sell the magic of that place, every Australian will have the opportunity to see how wonderful my home is. There is a great opportunity for educational tourism, which I have said to the minister for Tourism. Every Australian should come to Alice Springs to see the magic of language, law and culture being spoken and practised every day on the streets. You can walk down the main street of Alice Springs and hear ancient languages from 20 different Aboriginal nations. It is remarkable that we can still celebrate the connection of language, law and culture in our beautiful town. That is an invaluable tourism experience.

To all our tourism operators, Aboriginal tourism operators and businesses, keep up the great work. NT IBN does a deadly job to get the Northern Territory Government to increase Indigenous procurement positions. Supporting local business is important. Though the world is moving online, there are still great businesses. Novita Gifts in Alice Springs recently celebrated its 50th birthday, and we must continue to support it.

This has been a great chance to speak about economic opportunities. The Territory is the land of opportunity, particularly when it comes to the economy, so we should all get behind innovative projects. I remember when Gerry McCarthy—a former minister in the Northern Territory—used to speak about hydrogen, and people thought he was off the mark. Now, we understand how enormous the opportunities are regarding hydrogen.

We should be looking at innovative ways of doing things and not be scared to be bold, but it must be done sustainably.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, it seems rude to interrupt the Member for Gwoja's love letter to Alice Springs. I am almost saddened to have to bring the debate back to economic development and infrastructure, but that is the issue of the day, so I must do as needs must.

I applaud the courage of the Labor opposition for drawing attention to its record on the economy, delivery of major projects and realisation of infrastructure, but honestly, for the second day in a row, this is an own goal. I am amazed to have the opportunity to—once again—point out just how grossly negligent Labor's handling of the economy has been for eight years.

I will not be unsporting about it because I understand from the Deputy Speaker that it was the Leader of the Opposition's 40th birthday yesterday, and I do not want to be the one to ruin the celebrations two days in a row. I will be gentle in what I say and make sure I stick to things that are constructive and useful to reflect on.

Similar to yesterday when we talked about health infrastructure, there is a lot of inability to face reality. We are now in a fantasy land of historical revisionism in terms of what was done with the economy in the last eight years regarding bricks-and-mortar infrastructure and workforce. Yesterday I spoke at length about healthcare workforce because that is an important, salient topic.

Thank you to the Leader of the Opposition for the shout-out regarding DAMA III. This is a great achievement, and I thank the Minister for International Students, Migration and Population for allowing me to be a part of the signing the other day. I had a bit to do with the background in years past. This is a great step forward for the Northern Territory.

Alas, we are talking about infrastructure today, not workforce. On that note, let us start talking about bricks and mortar, because that is what the bulk of the agenda and this motion is about. It is about the portfolio we diversified into and about creating greater opportunity for everyone in the Northern Territory through the delivery of major projects. Hang on to your hat, because there is a lot to say about that.

I spent a bit of time in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, as I have said before. It coincided with my return to Australia and catching up on a lot of Australian television. There is a fantastic show by the Working Dog crew, *Utopia*. I have to be honest with you; at a certain point I was binge-watching *Utopia* whilst trying to do good constructive work within the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet—within the Investment Territory and Major Projects space—and I could not tell whether I was on set or in a feverish dream. It was hard to distinguish between rhetoric, reality and fantasy.

I remember the Major Projects Commissioner—I should not name a public servant—saying, 'Take down that *Utopia* sign. It is confusing for everyone.' That was the state of affairs for Major Projects. In the year that I spent there, I saw a series of public servants scrambling because they were subject to the whims of ministers associated with Infrastructure, Major Projects and Treasury. There was a constant succession of announcements of god knows what. There was a lot of high-vis and not a lot of shovels. We did not get many major projects off the ground.

It is true that it is great to have blue-sky thinking and to think about diversifying our economy. I applaud the period in the wake of the Territory Economic Reconstruction Commission report and the period of thinking laterally about how we might structurally reform our economy. I will not take cheap shots today, but clearly prawn farms were not the answer. There are limits to diversification of the economy. That is what we discovered through that period.

It is about bringing it back to bricks and mortar. Today is not about workforce or love letters to Alice Springs; I do love Alice Springs, I might add. It is about the difference between infrastructure of substance and necessity and ventures of vanity. That is the thing. We concentrated a lot of time on infrastructure ventures of vanity.

My learned colleague, the Treasurer, already spoke at length regarding these issues and pointed out case studies in that space. It does not warrant reiterating the litany of disasters of announcements that have failed to materialise into anything beyond a press release.

The contention by the Treasurer is—I have every reason to believe him—that we have a \$5bn former infrastructure program, which notionally we are here to support and celebrate in this motion, but Labor did not leave the money to fund any of it. If that is the case, it is a terrible shame. Labor was running on fumes and tricking the Northern Territory public into thinking that we were doing things—that we had the money and the capacity to do things—when all we were doing was celebrating the naked emperor. It is a tragedy that has been uncovered in the books.

Rarely did we see a shovel touch the ground. There was plenty of high-vis but not many shovels. The two best examples of that are the Tiger Brennan Drive overpass and the art galleries. I would love to see those projects materialise. The fact is that they remain nothing more than artists' sketches. The Tiger Brennan Drive overpass is at least making some progress.

The government and the Treasurer are committed to doing a full review of the infrastructure program. Those on the other side are doing this Chicken Little 'the sky is falling in' routine of, 'The government will cut stuff'.

We will not cut stuff that did not exist. What can you cut? There are a lot of fantastical promises, some of which will now be revealed as being fantastical promises with no money to pay for them, which we will wipe off the books because they are just taking up space on the books. There will be a lot of that happening. There is no doubt that must happen.

Things need realistic secured funding. This government will deliver infrastructure responsibly with proper funding and within a well-managed budget framework to ensure the Territory's infrastructure needs are met without ballooning costs or delays. Do you know why I believe that? I say this especially to members of the opposition. It is because I will hold my government to account on these matters. Good luck wasting money on my dime. That will not happen.

My issue with the Tiger Brennan overpass is not the initiative—it is a great road and makes things much faster—but the mishandling of that project's execution, as evidenced in the significant \$100m blowout.

It is useful for all of us to have a moment of economic Zen and agree that it is good to diversify your economy, but there is such a thing as spreading yourself too thin. That is what we did. We spread ourselves too thin over time. In the relentless pursuit of trying to keep people happy, win votes, be politic and be populist, we had a lot of things being announced which, frankly, were not going to materialise.

It is great that we now have a foray into the critical minerals sector and that hydrogen, which was once thought to be a nonsense venture, has meat to it. There is a range of areas we have made forays into that are positive, but we also took some speculative bets without concentrating on our core areas of expertise, and at a time like this you have to come back to concentrating on those core areas.

I support the government's plans to focus on five key sectors because they are the ones that have historically paid off for us. My caution to my colleagues and the whole House is that, whether it is mining, gas, Defence, agriculture or tourism, it is hard to do anything without people. Therefore, we will need to work together on the workforce component of this solution. I think we are making positive steps in the right direction. DAMA III is a good example. I thank the minister for letting me know in advance, so I could pick the right tie for the photoshoot.

I go back to the Leader of the Opposition's soliloquy because it was beautifully put and fundamentally off the mark. The reality is that the fundamentals of the economy are not sound. I am afraid you will have to do better than randomly pick snippets of the Under Treasurer suggesting that things may be tracking all right. I am a fiscal conservative—as I have pointed out, I am discovering that I am more fiscally conservative than some of my peers in this regard—but I am also an economic rationalist. The rational economic position speaks for itself.

As early as November, a month after coming into this House, I let you all know that the Treasurer's Annual Financial Report's headline was net debt to revenue ratio. Net debt as a ratio to revenue was 108% in 2023–24, which was 11 percentage points higher than the 97% recorded in the year prior. We are all starting to understand—it is great that we are all getting on the same page—that debt is not a bad thing. You need to borrow money to do things. We need lines of credit and money to mortgage houses. You borrow money to make money, and you spend it productively. However, we borrowed beyond our means. We will need to be more restrained and disciplined in how we spend and move forward; otherwise, our credit rating—which is currently Aa3, which ain't much to write home about—will be in jeopardy.

The government has inherited a difficult position whereby it does not want to depress consumer demand or have mass lay-offs of public servants. We are not that dumb; that will not happen. We are trying carefully not to spend our way out of the problem but make sure that in the short run we spend enough to keep the wheels of the economy turning to maintain confidence and, in fact, translate what is optimism at the moment into economic confidence. They are two different things, and we will all learn that over the next period. It is great there is optimism in the market, but translating that into economic confidence requires facing reality and making tough decisions.

I applaud the fact that the Treasurer is doing a pretty good job so far after being handed an absolute hospital pass and trying to work with it as best he can. It is tempting to forensically deconstruct Labor's fiscal and economic mismanagement—really tempting. I waited, chomping at the bit, to rip apart multiple Treasurers' statements from bygone years, but we need to move forward constructively now instead.

I love these small moments of bipartisan Zen that we have. I thank the Member for Gwoja for acknowledging our shared interest in the arts sector and that there is a high return on investment and a multiplier effect when we invest in the arts in the Northern Territory. Who knows? Someday soon we may end up at a gig together.

However, for the time being we need to move forward constructively by looking at what we have—the nuts and bolts—in the numbers on paper. That is what we on this side of the House are doing at both the macro NT scale and the local scale. However, let us first talk, given there are so few chances to do it, about the national scale in the wake of the federal budget from last night.

It is true, I am sorry to say—my colleagues are by and large right—that the federal budget does little to help the Northern Territory Government anew. We have obviously maintained a lot of existing commitments, and a lot of things are being done for Australians across the board, but there is nothing super special just for us other than a short stretch of roadworks. That is true.

To that point the shadow Treasurer, Angus Taylor, is I think bang on in his assessment, which is that the budget released last night is for the next five weeks but not for the next five years. That is entirely predictable, given that we are all but five weeks away from a federal election. It is disappointing that the budget does little to address the medium-term structural deficit which is probably expected to total close to \$180bn over the forward estimates. Likewise, it does little to address productivity, aged care and constructively moving forward the housing accord. It does nothing on migration, even after having foreshadowed the essential skills visa which should have been progressing at this point.

Those things might all seem like macro concepts that have little bearing on the Northern Territory or infrastructure, but they do; that is the thing. We are all the more dependent and affected by the choices that the Commonwealth makes, so it is a missed opportunity. However, I will say again that it is a budget for five weeks, not five years. It is a budget that came about because Cyclone Alfred turned up and a budget had to be delivered. That is the truth of it. I will not browbeat about tax cuts; the fact of the matter is if you have more than 73c a day, as is predicted going over the forward period, you would probably stoke inflation. It is a modest adjustment in the lead-up to a federal election.

Instead, we should be thinking about how to build bridges with the Commonwealth, no matter who is in charge, for the betterment of the Northern Territory. I think we must work together on this because all versions of combinations at the moment are dangerous for us, no matter whether the federal government is Labor or Liberal and no matter whether there is local representation that is Labor or Liberal—sadly, I do not think it will be Greens in either instance, Member for Nightcliff. No matter which version of those four permutations you have, all versions of them could be problematic and challenging for the Northern Territory and its economy going forward.

We would do a whole lot better with the feds if we had a consistent and united position on wanting to get more of our fair share, because the only time they really take any of those arguments seriously—at least dignify them—is in relation to Indigenous disadvantage and closing the gap, and so they should, but there are other issues to be addressed. They are not addressed because we cannot consistently put up a unified front to the federal government to say, 'This is what we need'.

Cast your minds back to when we did the 50th anniversary motion. Think about those people who pioneered putting together this Legislative Assembly and about the causes they fought for together. It was their unified front on self-determination for the people of the Northern Territory that resulted in some of that coming together.

Frankly speaking, I fully maintain that we are in the crux of an economic crisis up here. Social and economic collapse is not an impossibility. I genuinely believe that unless we come together, start talking about economic ideas, agreeing on some of them and lobbying for them collectively, we will be a managed economy. We almost are at this point, and we are creeping ever closer towards that, by the day.

The federal budget from last night did little to address productivity, aged care or the housing accord and did nothing on migration. That is a problem in a place that needs unique and bespoke arrangements for migration, as with north Queensland and north-west Australia. It behoves us to work in cooperation with those jurisdictions that have much more political clout than us but face similar problems. We need to band together and ask for a new compact on migration for the north of Australia because that is the only way we will be able to find the sustainable workforce to supply people for all these industrial sectors that we have a desire to improve economically.

What was clear, though, from last night's reveal of the budget was that there is no more money for us for infrastructure. Here we are back at today's topic.

The fact is that after years of Territory Labor mismanaging our money—most recently over eight years, but probably a bit before that as well—the Commonwealth simply does not trust us to use its money. It ties it up

in equity rather than giving us cash. If we want more pocket money, we need to start making a more compelling case for not just why, but what we did with the last lot. We failed to do that for a time. 'I'm sorry. I don't know what we did with the pocket money you gave us.' 'What do you mean? You don't even know what you spent it on?' 'No, I just lost it'. That has been our situation for a while. We are, essentially, in a managed income situation. Think about that: we are basically operating using the equivalent of a Commonwealth BasicsCard. The Member for Gwoja was slightly off; it is not 70%.

Mr BROWN: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Pursuant to Standing Order 43, I move that an extension of time be granted to the member.

Motion agreed to.

Dr RAHMAN: Thank you, sir. I looked around at the rest of them and asked myself whether someone would do me a solid. As I said, it is a wonderful day for bipartisanship and a great day to talk about infrastructure and the economy for our mutual benefit.

We are now essentially in a managed income situation. Everyone is starting to get wise to that and the fact that there is some method to the manner of the deputy leader, who is pointing out that unless we start making money in new ways we will be hamstrung. I maintain that I am pro-sustainable resource development; whether it is mining or gas, I just want things to add up economically. We need to ensure that we have viable industries that are viable economic propositions which work in harmony with our society and our natural and built environments. Going forward our shared aspiration should be to build things that provide a return on investment that do good and provide us all with greater options, particularly for future generations.

Last night's budget revealed that we could use more money for infrastructure. That is true, but after years of us mismanaging our money, and particularly egregious mismanagement over the last eight years, I am sad to say that we are just not trusted. This government is seeking to rebuild some trust and confidence by demonstrating greater fiscal responsibility and discipline. That is required at this point.

We sometimes talk about the private sector, saying that unless we provide it with greater signals to market that we are a responsible jurisdiction people will not be interested in coming to park money here. Here is a hot tip: our number one ticketholder, our sugar daddy, is the Commonwealth. Unless we are in a position to demonstrate to the Commonwealth that we know what we are doing with our money, good luck getting more of it. We are working on exactly that.

This is why the Treasurer is systematically reviewing the Infrastructure portfolio, which was a catalogue of *Utopia*-esque nonsense, and is now trying to make good on that and turn it into something that we can deliver on. I fully expect, and demand, that when the Treasurer puts out a list of projects that we will invest in, they are infrastructure projects that will be costed, sensibly funded and ultimately delivered. That should be the aspiration.

We have spoken about the national scale. I will not speak about what happens at the Territory-wide level, because that is the purview of the Treasurer, and he will no doubt deal with that systematically over the coming months in the lead-up to the budget. The other important scale for us to talk about in regard to infrastructure is the local.

I see it in my electorate. I see Stuart Park, Winnellie shops and the state of disarray and decay at suburban shops across every electorate, frankly. Drive around Darwin—to say nothing of Alice Springs—to see where we have dropped the ball on investing in infrastructure that is less sexy, but in many ways is far more important because it provides the building blocks for sustainable growth. You look after a suburban shopping centre and it looks after the local community. There is a multiplier effect. There is a symbiosis when you invest in stuff at the local level properly. Infrastructure deficits exist in those areas across the Territory because of the preoccupation with ventures of vanity, focusing on things that were a bit more razzle-dazzle, but, frankly, did not have the return on investment that we need.

The thing with enabling and essential infrastructure—which we are all starting to talk about more in here, which is great—is that it comes in lots of different forms. My problem with the shadeless shade structure is not sunburn—I do not have a sunburn problem so that is not the issue—but that there is a necessity to invest in infrastructure, in particular, with a better return on investment. What would we get back from that development? Just think about it as a thought experiment at this point. Sure, it might have beautified the area and made it a bit shadier. Would it increase footfall and traffic in that area and make it easier to cross to and from? Would there be any significant economic multiplier effect from that project? No, it was largely somebody's thought bubble, 'I reckon we could put up a thing with some vines and make it look prettier in

the CBD'. 'Great, let us do that'. It was never a seriously well-thought-out project and, clearly, it was not well executed.

The challenge when we have limited money is that we need to invest in infrastructure with a better return on investment. In saying that, not all investment needs a high return. I have no problem whatsoever with art galleries. I will have it out with anyone who wants to take a pot shot at the art galleries. My problem is that the art gallery infrastructure projects were poorly and disingenuously costed and had no reasonable chance of being delivered on time or on budget. There is a social good that comes from investing in infrastructure of the type of art galleries.

One of the best bets on the local scale for an enabling and essential piece of infrastructure with a high potential for return on investment is the Stuart Park high street. I keep coming back to it because not only is it in my patch—of course I am championing it because it is in my patch—but also it is the neck that supports the head of the CBD on the body of the Northern Territory. That corridor, that strip of land, starting roughly where Ozanam House is down to the Daly Street Bridge, is an area ripe for gentrification. On one side is The Gardens and on the other is Stuart Park. There is high-density living, shops, cafes, restaurants and street frontage. That is the kind of area where Labor should have targeted its money. It had the capacity to do so; the planning scheme was in its favour and it had the money. Up and down that strip are some of the most important landholders and businesses rooted deeply in the Territory. That is the kind of area where we get an extremely high return on investment when we invest in infrastructure.

What would it take to improve that area? Not much because a lot of the work is already done for us. It is about traffic management in the first instance and making sure we fix the nine lanes of wasted traffic and instead have free-flowing traffic. Once you have free-flowing traffic in that area you can create wider shopfronts. There is a wealth of potential in that project. As I said, it is one of the best bets. It is not the only one, but it is the one that I will bang on about repeatedly. Unlike shadeless shade structures or a series of other things that are so big and far away that you will see no return on investment, if you were to tackle the Stuart Park high street you would find a much sooner than expected return on investment because the preconditions are already there for us to succeed in that space. We need to be smarter about what we do with infrastructure spend, which we clearly have not been for a long period.

Nobody is talking down the Territory. On this side of the House we are facing reality. Labor's delusional optimism and denialism beggars belief. The opposition—I say this advisedly—is out of its depth on the economy. I do not think that is necessarily the fault of the current opposition members; quite frankly, they probably had very little to do with setting the economic agenda of the last eight years and the last two administrations. However, now is the time to own the fact that you were led down the garden path by people who did not know what they were doing in economic management, distance yourself from it and start finding common ground with us on how to move forward. We are all in this boat together and we will go down together unless we work together.

I can only hope that the opposition will come back with a more credible analysis and more credible arguments before the May budget sittings; otherwise, this will be painful for all of us and we will all just be slinging mud in silly ways when we have limited money, limited time and an economic crisis. Now is the time for us to collectively band together and do something about it. Do we need more money for infrastructure? Yes, 100%. Should we spend it more prudently and wisely on things that will provide a better economic and social return on investment? Absolutely. I implore all of us to think about trying to do that collectively.

Today's motion is that we acknowledge the outstanding work done by the private sector in developing a portfolio of projects valued at over \$57bn, spanning critical sectors such as minerals and resources, digital innovation, renewable energy and agribusiness. Yes, partially we can. Looking at the second part, do we commend the 2024–25 infrastructure program for its significant contributions to building a better Territory, fostering economic development and improving the quality of life for all Territorians? I am afraid not. I am sorry; no. We have not achieved that, but we could. I want us to achieve that. I believe that we will achieve that if we can work together.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I would have continued the bipartisan Zen and given the member another extension if I could, but, sorry, I might kill the bipartisan Zen now because I will talk about gas.

The struggles of the Territory and the global economy more broadly are getting worse. If done correctly, however, the private sector, regulated such that people are put before profit and with unions at the table so that workers are represented, can transform our local economy to the benefit of all Territorians. Recently in Australia this has rarely been the case. Economic benefit has gone to the very wealthy and the very few. In



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

MULTIFAITH COMMUNITIES, HARMONY
DAY & MULTICULTURALISM

WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

sometimes in those cases, people have been comfortable to finally say, 'Enough is enough. I need help from a service or government.'

Do not just think about the statistics as way to pointscore. That is on both sides; I am not saying that one side is guilty and the other is not. We all need to be mindful when we are talking about statistics that we are talking about people and the experiences that people have been through. It is incredibly important that we do not lose sight of that. As the statistics get worse because people feel comfortable to say, 'Enough is enough', let us not use that against them or perpetuate the stigma that is attached to women in our community when they finally come forward.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, over the last month a lot of us have enjoyed engaging in several events that celebrate our diversity, and I thought that was worth reflecting upon briefly tonight.

On 14 February we had a huge interfaith reception next door, which was a celebration of the NT's multi-faith communities. There were 60-odd groups represented and it was a huge tapestry of the world all in one room.

It was a privilege to be the emcee, on behalf of the Chief Minister, and to introduce the guest speaker, Imam Adama Konda, who I grew up with. He is a man from Burkina Faso, of all places. Try to find that on a map. He was one of many multi-faith leaders who spoke well and very kindly on that day, including Bishop Charles Gauci, Father Christos Tsoraklidis, Mr Gurkkal and Dr Edwin Joseph, the multicultural president. There was great wisdom shared from all of them.

There are several other events I could go through in the same vein. I will not go through them all forensically, because I want to draw attention to the bigger picture. There were a couple of things that I think we all delighted in. People have been celebrating a number of things to do with Ramadan, which this year neatly coincides with Lent, making it easier for people across the spectrum to all suffer in silence together, exercise self-restraint and be mindful of trying to do good.

On 9 March many of my colleagues and I—in fact, many of us in this room, across parties—were at the United Muslims of Northern Territory Interfaith Iftar event at the Hilton, which was lovely. I ate my fill that night. Likewise, just this weekend we were at the Islamic Society of Darwin Grand Iftar in Casuarina, which was a lovely celebration. It was lovely to see so many people of different faiths all breaking bread together.

There have been so many different Holi events that I do not know which one to pick, but everyone has delighted in being able to play Holi, throw the colours around, get out there and get mucky. For anyone who has been wondering, the reason I am not there is that I am allergic to half the dyes. I found out the hard way several times over. I am no longer allowed to get coloured in colours; I will turn out in hives. It was a phenomenal opportunity for everyone to come together, particularly to celebrate our growing Nepalese community which is now shooting up the ranks as one of the most numerous ethnic groups represented in the Northern Territory.

Last week, on 19 March, we had a massive Harmony Day celebration outside. Everybody was resplendent in orange. On 21 March, on Harmony Day itself, a number of you will have attended different things across the Territory. I was lucky enough to go to the ARRCs (Australian Regional and Remote Community Services) group, which had a little gathering. It was fantastic to celebrate Harmony Day with other people.

The thing that binds all this together—this is the point I want to make—is we are not a multicultural nation by accident; there is something underlying all of this. Behind all the costumes, colour, food and saying how wonderful diversity is, lies effort. It is worth remembering that because it is not something we should take for granted.

Our First Nations people are the original inhabitants who provided multicultural experiences in many ways, engaging with people across shores. For 65,000 years ATSI people have sustained many cultures and more than 250 languages on this continent. If we fast-forward to the post-World War II era, from 1945 to 2024 we welcomed 7.5 million immigrants, which included almost one million of them as refugees and people in humanitarian need. More than half of the Australian population was born overseas or has at least one parent who was born overseas and 5.5 million Australians speak a language other than English at home. They are the foundations of the diversity in this Chamber. It is worth remembering that we go back a long way in that regard.

It was not until 1973 that the White Australia policy was removed, which was not that long ago. Think about what that was—a policy that excluded non-European immigration. During that period immigrants were expected to leave their cultures and languages behind. Forget your Laksa Festival; it was a different time.

In the 1960s and 1970s we started to move forward and question whether that was necessary, and wanted to be a more inclusive country, probably from 1973 onwards. Al Grassby, the Immigration minister in the Whitlam government, was the first person to release a paper called 'A multi-cultural society for the future'. It presented a bold vision of a society that embraced cultural difference while fostering unity, and marks the beginning of our formal recognition of multiculturalism as a strength of our society.

In 1975 at a ceremony proclaiming the *Racial Discrimination Act* in Parliament House, Prime Minister Gough Whitlam first referred to Australia as a multicultural society. He was supported in the speeches that surrounded that by the Leader of the Opposition at the time.

In 1977 we had the Ethnic Affairs Council advise the Fraser government. It recommended a public policy, finally, on multiculturalism in its report, *Australia as a Multicultural Society*. In 1978 the Fraser government implemented the first official national multicultural policy. That was only 45 years ago. It is not that long that we have had multiculturalism. That is the reality of it. That was in accordance with the recommendations of the Galbally report.

In 1979 we had an Act of parliament establishing the Australian Institute of Multicultural Affairs. In 1986 that was repealed by the Hawke government, but then replaced in 1987 by the Office of Multicultural Affairs which was created in the Office of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to give it proper weight and gravitas and to recognise that multiculturalism belonged as a central concern of government within its central agency.

In 1989 the Hawke government produced the National Agenda for a Multicultural Australia, which had bipartisan support. In 1996 the OMA (Office of Multicultural Affairs) was absorbed by the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs under the Howard government. The Howard government, likewise, launched its report in 1999, *Australian Multiculturalism for a New Century: Towards Inclusiveness*.

I will not cover the period between 2000 and the present day—the last 25 years—because it is not necessary in the sense that there have been some policy shifts, but basically there has been bipartisan support for multiculturalism across Australia over that time. However, there have been challenges, and multiculturalism has been threatened at times. We live in tumultuous times and a time of global turmoil and instability, fragmentation and politics being driven to extremes on both edges. We live in relative harmony here, and we take it for granted to a large extent.

It is great that we have the Chung Wah Society with the lions, the Laksa Festival and the events that we have, but do not forget these were all hard-fought and won gains. It would not take much to erode them. It does not take much for social fragmentation to occur. When people are economically and socially stressed—which I think it is fair to say they are in the Northern Territory now—that is when stuff kicks off.

It is important that we, as Members of the Legislative Assembly, fight for multiculturalism. It is not just a word; it is an ethic, and it deserves being fought for in my opinion. The point I make is that it is also a policy commitment, which is why I gave that exhaustive documented history, if you like. The policy was also hard-fought and won over time, and it requires attention, nurturing and a genuine ongoing commitment to ensure that it does not crumble in our face.

I was lucky when I first went to the UK to study for my PhD to work for a gentleman called Professor Ceri Peach. The late Emeritus Professor Guthlac Ceri Klaus Peach was a professor of social geography and an adviser to numerous British governments over a long time about British white people and Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus getting along and not getting along. This was a guy who advised government on social cohesion and what ends up happening if you do not put in place the right policy settings and you do not defend those rights. He wrote extensively about race riots as well.

I had a long time to think about these issues under his tutelage. I learnt a lot. At the time I sort of resented it thinking, 'I come from multicultural paradise; I do not need to know any of this', but it turns out that it is useful to know because some of what is going on in the Northern Territory now makes me worry about how durable our multicultural polity really is.

He offered me a cautionary note at the time about fighting for multiculturalism, and I offer that to the House now as well. The UK, which is every bit as diverse as here, does not have nearly the same unified front when it comes to multiculturalism. Bear in mind that Prime Minister David Cameron declared in 2011 that state multiculturalism was a failure in the UK. I never want to see that happen in the Northern Territory. I think it is important that we fight for multiculturalism and remember how much value it gives us. I will wrap up on that point.

I am excited that Stuart Park Primary School has extended its multicultural celebrations, and on Friday I will be at its Harmony Day Assembly Spectacular. Long live our commitment to multiculturalism in Australia.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I thank the Member for Fong Lim for that speech on multiculturalism; it was quite enjoyable.

First I will quickly put on the record that while the Member for Johnston was reading the open letter from 170 frontline workers, some of whom were here, there was a fair amount of scoffing and sniggering from some members on the other side. Here is a tip for free: it is not a good look to ridicule or dismiss frontline workers when they happen to disagree with your government. I just wanted to put that on *Hansard*. It was witnessed by a few of us.

Now I will give a happy, fluffy adjournment speech on the latest happenings in my wonderful electorate of Nightcliff.

The iconic local festival Seabreeze is back from 9 to 11 May. The best foreshore in town will be blessed with three fantastic days and nights of music, art, food and culture. This festival is entirely reliant on donations and sponsorships, and I am proud to announce that I am sponsoring the festival with a \$5,000 donation.

Members: Hear, hear!

K McNAMARA: It is from the electorate allowance, not my personal bank account; let us be honest.

The Seabreeze Festival is incredibly important for our young and emerging artists, as they get a chance to play alongside some of Darwin's more established and well-loved acts.

I will also be judging the sandcastle competition which is a big responsibility, and I look forward to it.

Nightcliff Primary School had its pottery art showcase on Tuesday afternoon and today. I was sad to miss it due to Assembly sittings, but I am glad to support Nightcliff Primary School in its fundraisers. Well done to all the young artists. A special shout-out to my eldest, who has a pottery mug in the show. I am sorry I could not be there, but I am excited to see what you made when I get home.

Last Friday I had the immense honour of being the guest speaker at the Mary Moylan Social Worker of the Year Award. Many of our frontline workers are social workers. This award honours the memory of Mary Moylan, a dedicated and inspiring NT social worker. Congratulations to the winner, Dr Christine Fejo-King, and to all the nominees. It was incredibly well deserved. It was an evening of networking and celebration that acknowledged all nominees and the dedication and inspiring contributions of social workers to the Northern Territory.

I am grateful for all the incredible work that social workers do across the NT. In my electorate I have been heartened to see the work of Mission Australia's team. Their work in Litchfield Court has demonstrated the critical role of social work in fostering resilience and empowering communities whilst also ensuring social equity in the face of structural and immediate challenges. A big shout-out to the Mission Australia group mob and all the other social workers in the Nightcliff electorate.

As I reflect on the work of social workers I keep coming back to the idea of this social safety net we have. When I think about a net I think of all the woven threads held together at each intersection by a knot. Someone told me this analogy was a bit cringe, but I will go with it anyway. These knots I see as the social workers; they hold everything together. They connect the strands and they connect people to the fundamentals—safe housing, protection from domestic violence, education, nourishing food and finding purpose in people's lives. Thank you, social workers, for being the knots that hold the whole net together.

Over the weekend I had the chance to attend a citizenship ceremony as a guest of the Multicultural Council of the Northern Territory. It was exciting, as it was the first time I had been to something like this. It was a beautiful time of celebration and reminded me that the diversity of our nation and communities is one of our utmost strengths.

At the ceremony I bumped into some of my old neighbours who used to live in Nightcliff. Unfortunately, Palmerston has them now, so it was a loss to Nightcliff. Amit and Mona are from India. On the weekend Amit, Mona and their seven-year-old received their Australian citizenship. Congratulations to Amit, Mona and Kriv and everyone else at the ceremony.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

SCRUTINY OF WATER AMENDMENT BILL

THURSDAY 27 MARCH 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mr PAECH: Do not laugh and disrespect Aboriginal people, Member for Nelson—Goyder.

Madam SPEAKER: Please sit down.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: That is bordering on disorderly. Member for Gwoja, we will take a deep breath and we will listen to each other respectfully. The Member for Blain has just started his speech; he is 29 seconds into it. Please listen to what he has to say.

Mr KERLE: I pick up the Opposition Leader's interjection alleging a glass jaw. From the number of interjections this morning I think it is obvious who has the glass jaw.

Ms Uibo: Not to you—to this one here sticking his tongue out like a baby.

Madam SPEAKER: Opposition Leader, you are on a warning.

Mr KERLE: As I was saying, under the watch of the previous Labor government domestic violence increased by 82%.

When I visit bush communities the number one thing that elders talk to me about is bringing back their local community councils. They still feel disempowered by the actions of the previous Labor government that took away their local community councils. Luckily, we have this government, and the Member for Barkly is in charge of bringing back those community councils and giving back local determination to the people in community.

The second thing elders talk about is housing. Again, the Member for Barkly will sort that out.

The third thing they talk about is economic development on country. Water is a key part of that. I support this Bill that the Member for Braitling has brought in and I oppose the Member for Gwoja's amendment because Indigenous Territorians need economic development on country, and this is a key part of delivering that.

The previous government created confusion with its legislation, which made it difficult to do business under this regime.

I commend this Bill.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I will speak to the process, not the substance of what we are discussing. This is coming to a head repeatedly, with discussions regarding scrutiny and what should and should not be sent to a scrutiny committee.

We are playing fast and loose with the Westminster system and what we should and should not do. The only part that is embedded in our process is that we provide the Bill and the time for people to consider the Bill and consult widely in the community in whatever form they determine consultation to be. Twenty-eight days have been provided. This is not a Bill on urgency, so there is ample opportunity for everyone in this House to solicit feedback from people in the wider community.

It is important to note that a scrutiny committee is not a substitute for this legislature; it is an additional mechanism that did not exist under the original Westminster system provisions. This is foreshadowing debate to some extent—not that anyone knows—as later this evening I will speak about the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference that members of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee attended. We learnt a lot at that conference, and I will table documents when I speak about it later.

I point out that scrutiny committees do not function the same way everywhere. They are not all functioning as ours does, but at least we have a scrutiny committee. The reality is that we have gone from having nothing to having something.

If the opposition and crossbench are dissatisfied with the government's prerogative to choose when to send things to the scrutiny committee, that is a subject they should take up separately. They should challenge the sessional orders, mount a campaign and seek to change the terms on which the scrutiny committee operates, but at this time we have sessional orders and a process. We must respect that process. I am a believer in process in this regard. This government at least had the decency to put a scrutiny committee back in place.

My personal position—I am happy to declare it—is that I would prefer the scrutiny committee to address things as a de facto standard, as is the case in many other jurisdictions, but if that were to be the case we would need a legislature with a lot more resources than we have at the moment. I do not want our scrutiny committee to just become a pointless forum for protest. That is essentially what it will be if we continue down this track.

I implore all members of the Assembly to think carefully about how best we can utilise the mechanisms at our disposal. I understand the intention behind the amendment. I do not disagree with the intention, which is to provide people in the community an opportunity and a voice to speak on an important Bill. I will consult widely with my community about the Bill, and I encourage you all to do the same and bring back your collated data to the Chamber in six weeks' time so that we can systematically go through it.

The question of whether you are heard to your satisfaction is a matter of our democratic process. I am not rejoicing in the democratic system we have here; it is essentially a winner-takes-all system. However, the reality is that the people of the Northern Territory, in the most recent election, elected a government of 17 of us. The 17 of us are collectively doing the best we can to progress the Northern Territory socially and economically in a balanced way. Not everything we do will be to your liking or of your choosing, but it will ultimately be a matter for the people to decide whether they are satisfied with our direction and governance.

I am all for having a discussion about our processes, how our committee system works, how our motions work and, frankly, the standard of conduct in this place, which I still generally find is pretty disgusting. It is up to all of us collectively to do something about that.

This amendment will not pass. Rather than bemoaning it not passing or politicising the Bill not being sent to a scrutiny committee, concentrate on speaking for the people you represent, bringing those voices to the Chamber and fighting your corner in that regard. We will do the same.

I believe the intention behind the Bill is sincere. I do not believe that the Minister for Lands, Planning and Environment is out to nefariously destroy ...

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

It is also past 10.30 am, so I ask the photographers to leave the Chamber, please.

J DAVIS (Johnston): Madam Speaker, I also support this amendment.

As a member of the scrutiny committee, our job is not just to see what people like or do not like. It is not just to talk to constituents, which of course we will all be doing. We will bring back to this House what our constituents think, and I hope it will be heard by the Chamber. However, the job of the scrutiny committee is much more than that; it is to consider whether a Bill referred to it has sufficient regard to the rights and liberties of individuals, including a list of items, many of which are significant and relevant to this Bill. We have a job; we are here to help the parliament, not to stand in the way of things.

I rejoice that the scrutiny committee came back. It enhances our system. I agree with the Member for Fong Lim that the baseline, as it is in many other jurisdictions, should be that by default Bills go to the scrutiny committee. We would need far more resources to do that well. However, in a parliament as unbalanced as this when a Bill is of great importance and clearly of great significance to people, including in this Chamber, we should not have to argue that we can do more work to make sure that Bill is as good as it can be for the whole Northern Territory. That should be the default.

I strongly support this amendment. We know not every Bill can go to the scrutiny committee. This Bill has a significant impact on the rights and liberties of individuals. Part of the scrutiny committee terms of reference is that we must make sure that Bills have sufficient regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tradition, and this Bill goes directly to that. This amendment will enable the Bill to be better. It will enable all of us in this parliament to do our job better.

Mr BURGOYNE (Water Resources): Madam Speaker, it is important to look at what has been said regarding the amendment and why it should be adopted. I pick up on many things that members said.

The NT has nation-leading legislation as it relates to water allocation and the Aboriginal water reserve. Those opposite put in place many of those laws, which we are now speaking about. The problem with those laws is that there is 60 gegalitres—this is important for those opposite to understand—in the Aboriginal water reserve allocated for Aboriginal people that cannot be utilised now or activated due to that failed legislation previously.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

WORLD AUTOIMMUNE & ARTHRITIS
DISEASE DAY

TUESDAY 20 MAY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Julie was there with The Silver Brumby Coffee Caravan. MeeMa's Kitchen, Lolly & Craft Shop with Sylvanna entertained the children with her amazing arts and crafts. The baked goods were something that had to be seen to be believed.

Rowie Schulz from my office should be commended on her efforts to ensure the event could go ahead. It truly is a massive thing to put on a public event these days.

Local builder Blueprint Construction assisted with a temporary fence. Darren Burton builders then assisted in putting up the exterior fence with the local Man Walk group on the day helping with what we commonly call the playpen, the entertainment arena where kids can safely interact with the entertainment on the day and parents can keep a close eye on what is happening without having to worry about their kids running off.

Rex from the reptile centre came along and put on a reptile display that the kids loved. Alice Springs Family Daycare helped out with games for the children after the beginning of the event.

This culminated in the Teddy Bear parade. What a job it was to judge that.

I cooked pancakes for the masses, and the Treasurer's sausage sizzle was a hit as always.

Michelle Bell and many other volunteered their time on the day to ensure its success. Once again, I give a huge thank you to Rowie Schulz from my office, and David Koch, Ashley and Shane from the Member for Namatjira's office.

It was a wonderful event put on for the community with all money raised going towards a local community group to support the work of Alice Springs Family Daycare.

I also mention the Bangtail Muster. I thank the combined Rotary Clubs of Alice Springs, along with event organiser, Eli Melky, who ensured everyone was where they needed to be. This year was exceptionally special, with Lilly-Marie taking part in her first-ever Bangtail Muster, following in her mum and dad's footsteps. My mum often recalls me being on the back of a truck as a gumnut baby. To see Lilly-Marie dressed as a unicorn will be something I will never forget.

Thank you to the educators at Braitling Preschool—Ms Nikki, Ms Heleena and Ms Lilly—along with all the other mums and dads who came to assist on the morning. The Magic of Friendship was the theme for this year's event. It is the sort of wonderful event that reminds everyone in town why we choose to live in The Alice.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, today, 20 May, is World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day. The day is dedicated to raising awareness about autoimmune and inflammatory arthritis diseases, which are systemic conditions affecting multiple parts of the body.

The day was established in 2012 by the International Foundation for Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis to raise global awareness of these conditions and forms of arthritis like rheumatoid arthritis, lupus, ankylosing spondylitis and juvenile idiopathic arthritis. The initiative arose from the recognition that these chronic and often debilitating conditions are frequently misunderstood, widely under-diagnosed and sometimes overshadowed by more familiar forms of arthritis like osteoarthritis.

The day serves as a global platform for patients, healthcare professionals and advocacy groups to come together, share resources and educate the public about the early signs, systemic nature and long-term impacts of autoimmune diseases. Through virtual events, social media campaigns and international collaboration, World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day has fostered a sense of solidarity within the global patient community, whilst advocating for improved diagnostics, access to care and increased research funding.

What are autoimmune diseases? First of all, autoimmune diseases are considered to be one of the least understood areas of medicine. Although scientists know of about 80 of these diseases, the exact causes and triggers of them remain largely elusive. This makes diagnosis, treatment and ultimately prevention of these conditions extremely challenging. Our lack of understanding is compounded by the fact that autoimmune diseases vary in their symptoms and diagnosis, and they lack definitive diagnostic tests. There is limited understanding of triggers, a focus on symptom management and under-recognition and a lack of awareness globally.

What we do know, in simple terms, is that autoimmune diseases impact the body by causing our immune systems to mistakenly attack our own body tissues and organs. Instead of protecting the body from harmful invaders like viruses and bacteria, the immune system targets cells, proteins or entire systems as if they were threats. This misdirected immune response can lead to chronic inflammation, tissue damage and impaired function of affected areas like joints, skin, nerves, glands and internal organs. Likewise, common impacts include debilitating fatigue and pain, particularly in the muscle and joints, skin rashes, digestive issues and hormonal imbalances. Over time these diseases can lead to permanent damage if they are not properly managed, potentially resulting in disability and/or life-threatening complications.

Equally significant and often under-recognised is the impact that these diseases can have on people's families. The chronic nature of these conditions means loved ones may need to take on caregiving roles, adapt their work schedules and provide emotional support, often over many years. This can place strain—as with many other conditions—on relationships, finances and the overall family wellbeing, particularly when people are affected by experiences such as unpredictable flare-ups and ongoing pain and fatigue. For families with young children and young adults, there may be additional stress in regard to schooling, social life and future independence. Partners, likewise, often report feelings of helplessness, burnout and anxiety as they try to support loved ones whilst maintaining household stability.

The cumulative effect can be a reduced quality of life for not just the patient but also the family unit as a whole. Support groups, flexible employment options and access to reliable healthcare and counselling are critical in helping families to manage the long-term impacts of diseases such as these. This is where the critical services of our healthcare providers become so pivotal.

In the NT health and hospital system an important role is played by a broad delivery of services to try to support autoimmune care. These institutions provide access to multidisciplinary teams comprising rheumatologists, immunologists, neurologists and allied health professionals, all of whom work collaboratively to offer comprehensive treatment in a difficult area. These services help to ensure that autoimmune healthcare is accessible to Territorians.

I thank our healthcare workers, clinicians and researchers for working on these difficult-to-pin-down diseases and their dedication to patients and advancing treatment options in this field. I thank them, not least, because I am the beneficiary of their efforts and because my late grandfather, Muhammad Nurul Huq OAM, whom I spoke about at length in my maiden speech, also was the beneficiary of their diligent work.

My grandfather, as I mentioned previously, was a prolific man but one whose working life was cut short by rheumatoid arthritis.

For the uninitiated, osteoarthritis is a degenerative condition where cartilage breaks down due to wear and tear on your body, often affecting larger joints like your hips and knees. Rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease, the likes of which I am speaking about today, where the immune system attacks the joints, primarily the synovial membrane, leading to inflammation and pain that can affect joints and smaller joints in the hands and feet.

I watched my grandfather's decline in mobility over many years, his increasing pain and the impact on my grandmother and family over many years. I watched him go through four knee replacements; each time they would come up with a novel material trying to solve the problem. He went from steel to plastic to titanium to carbon fibre, which was something of an ordeal in and of itself. The point I am making is that in his day there was less public awareness, less support, less sympathy and fewer treatment options available for autoimmune diseases, which are one of the vanguard areas for medical research in the modern era. I am glad that things are better in 2025 than they were in 1985 and 1995 for him in managing those conditions.

The other reason I mention this is that I too manage an autoimmune condition, which I mentioned in my maiden speech—myasthenia gravis. It is a random condition that no-one interesting or famous has except for the godfather of Indian cinema, Amitabh Bachchan. Indians frequently will recall exactly who he is and what the condition is. I am no Bollywood film star, as we all know, but we have in common the chronic autoimmune disorder where the immune system attacks neuromuscular junctions throughout our body, disrupting communication between nerves and muscles. This leads to fluctuating muscle weakness and fatigue which worsens with activity and improves with rest.

The disease can affect muscles controlling eyes, facial expression, chewing, swallowing and speaking. However, I am pleased to report, as you can all attest to, that although many in this House may have noticed me winking at them on a regular basis because of my variable vision, I clearly have not lost control of my capacity to speak. I probably will not be able to hit a cricket ball very well ever again, though.

In all seriousness, I thank all those who have helped me on my health journey, noting that it is only with the help of others that you can overcome the myriad challenges that life presents you. That includes, no less, the lovely people at RDH and within our neurology services.

Although there is no cure per se for my ailment, treatments such as medication, thymectomy—a complicated surgery which was performed successfully on a mouse some 80 years ago, so people continue that process—and blood transfusions help people like me to manage the symptoms of an autoimmune condition and lead relatively normal lives. On that note, I thank the staff at the day surgery clinic at RDH whom I periodically see for, as my friends euphemistically call it, an oil change.

I raise this tonight, in all seriousness, not for pity but to raise awareness and, moreover, to express gratitude and take a moment to appreciate our health system and modern medicine and perhaps also to be reminded that behind the scenes we are all struggling with the innumerate complexities of life. Gratitude sustains optimism, as I noted in my maiden speech, and it is a good outlook to have in general. Likewise, we all face trials and tribulations, and it is worth occasionally reinforcing in places like this and at times like this the importance of being kind and considerate to one another, even in our sometimes combative workplace.

With that sentiment in mind, I will continue to draw attention to the ever-increasingly obscure, such as World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day, and support awareness initiatives. It is important to shine a light on it not only in the abstract but also in terms of how these things impact us in our place and context. I encourage all of you likewise to do the same and to consider some of the ways in which the Northern Territory is part of a bigger ecosystem of a country and a world, sharing common challenges and predicaments.

On that note, thank you for your indulgence. Happy, in so far as it can be, World Autoimmune and Autoinflammatory Arthritis Day to everyone.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will close the loop on some matters we have discussed in this Chamber, where we debate and pass Bills which become Acts in this wonderful Northern Territory of ours. This is important work. However, it is not so often that we get to evaluate, in almost real time, the effects that the Bills we pass have.

I draw attention to a decision of the Supreme Court in Alice Springs by His Honour Justice John Reeves in *The King v EM* [2025] NTSC 31, dated 9 May 2025. This decision deals directly with the two signature pieces of legislation of this Assembly. The first is Declan's law, which changed the presumption of bail, and the second is the *Bail Act* amendments that we passed on urgency recently.

I will read certain extracts. There is a lot that I will not read because there are matters to do with the offending, even though the offender is still on bail. I will not identify the offender, but the nature of the offending is not relevant to this discussion. What is relevant is that His Honour, when considering granting bail to this individual, was in the position that the defence and the prosecution appeared to be in favour of bail. He wrote in his decision:

Even though that was the agreed position of the parties, because ...

The defendant:

... had pleaded guilty to a very serious offence, I was not willing to act on it.

He went on to discuss the effect of the amendments. He wrote:

In considering the matters in ss 24 and 24A, the amendments ...

Meaning the amendments that we passed recently:

... have made two important changes. First, the risk (if any) to the 'safety of the community' that would result if a person were released on bail is 'the paramount consideration' of the criteria prescribed by those provisions. A 'paramount consideration' is one that 'must be treated as the highest level of importance'.

These are the words of a justice of the Supreme Court of the Northern Territory:

Nonetheless, 'other considerations are not entirely excluded...[they]...are only subordinated'. Secondly, remanding a youth in custody is no longer to be considered as the option of last resort.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S OMNIBUS BILL

WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak on an omnibus Bill. We have not had any in here for a while and, as is often the case, they are a bit of a mixed bag. There can often be little things snuck into them as red herrings, but I am pleased to report on this occasion that this is a sensible Bill covering things that need to be done to tighten up small parts of our legal edifice.

I am encouraged by the words of the Member for Daly and the sentiment that legislation should never be static or perhaps that it should not be immutable. Things change, things need to be adapted and we need to modernise with the times. That is what is reflected in this Bill: a recognition of the fact that in some instances our legislative and administrative frameworks have simply not kept pace with the modern day. On the advice of the public service, the Attorney-General's Department and practitioners in the field, this government seeks to tidy up a range of small matters which in totality have a cumulative effect of being able to improve the rigour within our legal systems.

As to the matter of legislative scrutiny committees, as I alluded to on Thursday of the last sittings, there is much to be said about how they can, should and do function. Later this week I expect to speak at some length about the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference that was held in Melbourne at the end of last year. Coincidentally, the Member for Daly and I both attended that, and we learned a lot about how we could move forward in that space.

What we have now, which is positive, is a legislative scrutiny committee. The preceding government saw fit to completely abandon the prospect of having one. This omnibus Bill was referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee. Sadly, or perhaps fortuitously, there was only one submission which was made by NAAJA. It was a considered submission that raised reasonable points for debate but were not profound enough to warrant any objection or substantive amendment to the Bill.

NAAJA does great work. I have known a lot of people who have worked there for a long time, and I will defend them to the hilt. However, I think it is fair to say that they err on the side of caution when it comes to protecting civil liberties and making sure that we do not accidentally run roughshod over rights, regulations and responsibilities. In that regard, I understand the concerns that NAAJA raised in their submission.

I presume everyone in this House has read the NAAJA submission to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee on this omnibus Bill, which I know you are all excited about. Having read it and having had plenty of experience with NTCAT, I do not necessarily think that we are messing with NTCAT in a way that will be deleterious to our legal system. For some time in this jurisdiction, NTCAT has been overwhelmed and swamped by people who have been putting in if not vexatious, then speculative, statements of claim. Something needs to be done in this space to clarify and codify that costs orders can be recovered and there is a minimum price of entry, as it were, to tango with NTCAT. I do not think this is a terribly bad thing; it will improve efficiency. I welcome a robust and accessible judiciary, but I do not want to set one up to fail by overwhelming it with vexatious claims.

I am encouraged by the support for the Bill that is evidenced in broad brushstrokes by the Labor opposition and the tone of the Member for Daly's statement which is constructive. Legislation should not be static and we need to be consultative, which the government was in this case. We provided an opportunity for people to make submissions to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for consideration. Having read the report, the committee had no axe to grind with the Bill.

In some ways, we are doing the equivalent of clearing the weeds from the back of the garden. It is not sexy work, but it needs to be done. Periodically, the garden gets messy out the back. There is a raft of laws, regulations and rules that simply are not maintained. If these things are not maintained, the garden goes to pot and, as I am finding out at the moment, the reticulation system is busted because I did not weed. Therefore, it is important that we do this kind of work.

I commend the Attorney-General for having referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee a review of all regulations in the Northern Territory statute book that predate 1990. It is important for us to do that work—to clear the back of the garden—to find out what is fit for purpose and which departments have processes in place to make sure that their statute book, regulations and procedures are still modern, fit for purpose and can serve the Northern Territory. That review is proceeding in earnest, but it still has a long way to go.

Without wanting to be too pointed, we are doing that review in no small part because nobody has done that weeding at the back of the garden for a while. A lot of these little fixes—I am sorry to say the last government did not do a good job of keeping the garden tidy out the back so that is why ...

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Stop the interjections. Through the Speaker, please.

Dr RAHMAN: I cannot draw attention to members of the Assembly who are absent, but I am sure that all former Attorneys-General of the Northern Territory would speak to the fact that we could have done more to maintain the weeds at the back of the garden over the years that have passed.

In any case, this is part of the government's commitment to tidying up and modernising. If we are talking about action, certainty and all that good stuff, part of it is about making sure that we do not have superfluous things hanging around the statute book and our systems. That is why this omnibus Bill has a range of different items, all of which do something to improve administrative frameworks within the Northern Territory.

I turn to the substantive items on the agenda. First of all, it is encouraging that the healthcare decision-making delegation has the support of the government. It is a sensitive area intersecting with guardianship and the difficult decisions that need to be made by one senior practitioner at the moment who has delegated authority. These are important decisions. There is a reason someone is prescribed to take on these jobs and it is not just *carte blanche* for anyone to do it. What has been proposed will help us create efficiency within the healthcare system by providing the senior practitioner the opportunity to provide delegated authority to, as I understand it, a couple of people who are earmarked as being able to take off some of that pressure.

Remember that healthcare requires not only clinicians but also administrators, infrastructure and systems. This is about improving that systemic background and set up.

I am encouraged that we are not having an unnecessary debate about coercion, public guardianship, control, powers and that sort of thing. Currently, two people within the healthcare system have been deemed appropriate, as I understand, to whom this authority could be delegated. That will take a considerable amount of pressure off the system from one person who, if not operating as a bottleneck, is overwhelmed by their responsibilities in isolation.

Let us move on to the justices of the peace and commissioners for oaths. This government prides itself on reducing red tape and creating regulatory efficiency. It would seem counterintuitive that we might be prescribing that all people who are commissioners for oaths or justices of the peace should require police checks as a mandated provision, because this Bill locks in the requirement for a national police check for anyone applying for those roles. However, it is important to realise that not everyone applies for those roles. There is a range of people who have these roles *ex officio*, including all of you in this Chamber. The Member for Karama probably uses his commissioner for oaths stamp more than anyone I know. We would not want to slow down his hard work.

It is important that we have commissioners for oaths and justices of the peace on the books, and enough of them. We could probably do with more of them, but we also want to ensure that we have the right people doing those jobs, so at the moment this is codifying what is already the practice in the Attorney-General's Department, which is to check that fit and proper persons are doing these jobs. This will not be a new administrative burden; it will add integrity to ensuring the people who certify and witness documents are fit and proper persons to do so. I am encouraged that we have the tick of approval from the opposition in this regard.

Modern conveyancing, land titles and property transactions—anyone who has attempted to purchase property recently will know how nightmarish it is in this jurisdiction relative to anywhere else because of the fact that almost nothing is done electronically. Not nothing, but a lot of things that are done electronically elsewhere are done on an abacus and stone tablets in this jurisdiction. I jest.

It is a step forward for us to move towards a modern conveyancing framework where we use e-conveyancing more to do land title transactions online rather than paper titles. This is a genuine modernisation step, and it reduces the friction within the property market. It is a significant point. There are studies about how when you make it easier to buy stuff, people buy stuff, and when you make it harder to buy stuff a lot of the time they become frustrated by the process.

In the ordinary course of events, people do not abandon property purchases because it is a massive pain dealing with conveyancers and paper. It just means it takes a lot more time and cost, and it slows down the fluidity of the system. What we are doing is genuinely long overdue. I have been hearing about it happening in this place for a long time; I am surprised that no-one has taken the bull by the horns on this issue previously. Potentially, the former government was more concerned about the front lawn looking good than weeding the

back garden. The point is we are doing the gardening work now. This is an important part of the edifice for us to tackle.

A legitimate concern that is raised from time to time is that electronic titling enhances Torrens title systems by making it faster, cheaper and more integrated, and maintaining government-backed certainty of ownership. There are risks, and those are well identified. It is good to put them on the record. Whenever you introduce electronic systems, there is a transitional period when you have to think about cybersecurity, accessibility concerns, technical vulnerabilities that need to be carefully managed through robust digital infrastructure and legislation and maintaining public trust. I am convinced, based on my briefings with the Attorney-General's Department, that those things are all being accommodated.

We are shifting from a 'must' to a 'may' situation to provide flexibility in a transitional mechanism so we can incrementally move towards a digitised system. There is no necessity to impose that, so for the older property investor who is used to doing things by paper and who knows their way around the system inside out, there will still be transitional mechanisms. However, for the increasing number of newer people moving into our marketplace, we hope—in keeping with incentivising housing supply in this jurisdiction—this will make things easier. A lot of people want to DIY, and honestly, it is pretty much impossible without digital conveyancing systems in place to give effect to that mechanism, so I am encouraged with the fact that it is happening.

Older people are the ones to be mindful of in transitioning to new technologies, so we are trying to mitigate any of those things by ensuring that people in remote areas and older people understand the digital systems and the transition away from paper titles.

In any case, it is almost impossible to purchase a property without a conveyancer, but at least this now provides people the option to move in that direction with the passage of time. That is a positive development as well.

The *Legal Profession Act* is the next part of this omnibus Bill. The amendments to the *Legal Profession Act* are also fairly sensible, bringing us in line with Solicitors' Conduct Rules. I am all for things that bring us up to code and up to standard with the rest of the country. This is an area where the legal profession has pushed for some of these changes, and we recognise that they are sensible changes to be made. At the moment, we go through a long process to adopt national laws that already work pretty well elsewhere, and this will bring the NT into line with uniform rules, improve processes and push us towards a best-practice environment which is what I think we are seeking to do in this space. It is uncontroversial, and I greatly appreciate the support from the government on this issue.

Synthetic medicines are probably the headline item in this omnibus Bill, and rightly so because they are a significant issue. It is important to understand that this has been pretty well thought through.

I will not go into a long lecture series on the danger of fentanyl. Fentanyl has its place within modern medical systems, but it is a dangerous drug that is increasingly starting to infiltrate recreational drug use. The consequences are significant, severe and not to be messed with. That is precisely why we are seeking to make fentanyl a Schedule 1 item, with a situation where you will have trafficable and commercial quantities for prescribed drugs being commensurate with other Schedule 1 drugs. That makes perfect sense to pretty much everyone operating in this space.

Sometimes there can be confusion when talking about the misuse of drugs, particularly when we are worried about one kid at BASSINTHEGRASS being caught with a pill in their pocket and then ending up with a mandatory 25-year sentence. That will not happen here. This will let people who are trafficking drugs be on notice that they are now trafficking a prescribed Schedule 1 substance and taking a significant risk if they choose to do so. Therefore, it is sensible to add fentanyl to Schedule 1, take it from Schedule 2 and make trafficable and commercial quantities the same as they are for other Schedule 1 drugs.

The safeguard is that the police and prosecution would still need to establish intent of sale and supply and would need additional indicia, for example, if somebody was supplying multiple pills or if somebody was to be prosecuted for being at an event and having recreational drugs in their pockets. We are trying to prevent harm, and this is a sensible amendment. One imagines that it has the opposition's support for that reason.

Continuous improvement is the object of this exercise and of our legal and administrative systems. I will not be any more pointed in my critique of what Labor has or has not done in regard to legislative reform and maintaining regulations that are fit for purpose. I have said enough on that, and we will come back to it in due course in any case. As to the matters that are objected to, I note that they are not strong objections as much as they are legitimate inquiries—that is how I would put them.

On the issue pertaining to NTCAT, I do not think it is unreasonable for us to move to a situation where, at a time when we know NTCAT is extraordinarily stretched, that we would make it clear and definitive that costs are recoverable in that forum. It does not prohibit people from initiating action in NTCAT. The bar for entry is still comparatively very low in every regard, not just financially but in terms of even the paperwork required to be put into that forum.

I think the changes are fine. If they were not, I would suggest perhaps amending that space.

NAAJA fulfils a valuable role in the Northern Territory. It has for a long time, notwithstanding that it has had some complex governance problems over a period of time, unfortunately. I respect the submission it made but also recognise that, on the balance of probabilities, these are reasonable changes to codify in the NTCAT space.

We are trying to stop vexatious litigation, and everything we do to shut that down and every small signal we put in place improves certainty within this jurisdiction. I want for a robust judiciary, a strong separation of powers, checks on executive power and for people to be able to access the justice system on reasonable terms. In that regard, I think we are making the right call.

The final part is the *Residential Tenancies Act* amendments. It is probably here where I must defer most to the guidance and expertise of the Attorney-General because the decision to make the amendment in this area sits with the Cabinet, to which I am not entirely privy. On the face of it, it seems entirely sensible to me. It is probably the case that over a period of time, we have set the public housing system up to fail on a range of metrics and this is potentially another area where that might be the case by having them maintain compliance with an administrative regulation that is simply unreasonable. I imagine that the Attorney-General will speak on that matter having been asked to comment on it by the Member for Daly.

These Bills are not as sexy and exciting as many other Bills, but I think they are every bit as important. I commend the huge amount of work done by the people in the background, because every one of these small legal changes can have a knock-on effect. Small legal changes in one place can interact and intersect with small legal changes in another place to the point where you can create unintended consequences. On the balance of probabilities, I see no real reason why we will accidentally trigger some harm by passing this law with minimum fuss.

It is worth reflecting on just how many Acts are covered in this law. This has intersections with the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992*, the *Domestic and Family Violence Act 2007*, the *Health Care Decision Making Act 2023*, the *Justices of the Peace Act 1991*, the *Oaths, Affidavits and Declarations Act 2010*, the *Local Court (Criminal Procedure) Act 1928*, the *Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal Act 2014*, the *Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal Regulations 2014*, the *Residential Tenancies Act 1999*, the *Sentencing Act 1995*, the *Victims of Crime Assistance Act 2006* and others.

I read that list out because I think it is important for everyone in the House to appreciate how much work has gone into this and how many people have had to look at this many laws to figure out how they intersect and how and when we can make these fixes. It is encouraging that the Attorney-General and her team have been able to pull together all these changes into an omnibus Bill. It is my hope that we will see more Bills like this in the future where we can engage in direct regulatory reform. One of the areas we talk about a lot but tangentially is alcohol reform. An area that comes up on a near-daily basis during sittings is domestic violence. There are things within the healthcare sector. There are enumerate areas where we could look at small fixes in legislation to improve regulatory efficiency without abrogating rights.

I encourage members of the Assembly to consider offering up those small fixes because an entire Bill is an enormous undertaking. We can identify specific problems. There is precedent around the world for parliaments filled with people of many different stripes being able to bring those forward to the government of the day and say, 'I have identified in this law this small thing that could be fixed with minimum fuss. Can you throw us a bone here?' Everybody gets a win out of it. Most importantly, the people of the Northern Territory get a win out of it when we improve regulatory efficiency.

If we are, in fact, to improve certainty, security and decision-making that people can rely upon, then we need to have robust systems in place. You need to do the remedial work of clearing things out from time to time as well. It is important that we do that.

I encourage especially the crossbenchers to think constructively about how they could offer to the government suggestions on small things that we might all collectively work on. Of course, the same offer is extended to the opposition.

There is not too much more I will say other than that there has been fairly extensive consultation on this Bill. I do not really think anyone can say that we did not ask for consultation on this Bill. Consultation occurred with the Attorney-General's Department, the Health department, NTCAT and some of the independent officers with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel.

This is probably one of the best considered pieces of legislation I have seen come through for a while. I think it will do good in its totality, albeit in small but significant ways nonetheless.

For those reasons, I commend the Bill to the Assembly and look forward to this being passed—touch wood—on the voices.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all the members who contributed to this important debate.

Member for Daly, thank you for your contribution. It was good to hear that you are supportive of this important omnibus Bill, which touches on a number of Acts across our system. I will answer the questions you had that were of concern to you. Maybe those questions were not asked during the briefing or in the scrutiny process of this Bill.

I also thank the Member for Fong Lim, who so eloquently summed up the important parts of this omnibus Bill with real-life examples of how each section of these changes can contribute towards our year of action, certainty and security. I particularly liked his analogy of tidying up Bills to modernise what is needed in our justice system which we need to be strong but has not been strong under eight years of Labor. He said it was a bit like Labor made its front lawn look good, but out the back it was full of weeds. That is exactly how it felt over the last four years in opposition listening to the Labor ministers go through their days. Sometimes during sittings we would have lots of statements and reports but not a lot of legislation.

Ms Uibo interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence, please!

Ms BOOTHBY: I am pleased and proud, as the Attorney-General, to have brought this Bill to the Assembly and to have had the contributions from the speakers. I am also proud that it was referred to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee—which we know was scrapped under the former Labor government. We brought the committee back in this term of government, and we are proud of that.

The Bill went out far and wide to see who would like to have their views heard. We received one submission from NAAJA (North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency). I thank Anthony Beven, the acting CEO at NAAJA, for the work he did to put forward that submission and I will address his concerns as well in part of this wrap-up.

The Bill makes a number of amendments to various legislation and deals with the variety of relatively discrete amendments to legislation that fall under my portfolio as Attorney-General. I will not read through them all because I did that in my introduction speech, but I will talk about a couple of the key features of the Bill which will hopefully answer the opposition's questions.

The amendments to the *Health Care Decision Making Act 2023* will ensure timely and appropriate care of people with impaired decision-making capacity. To do that, the Act will be amended to allow for the senior practitioner to delegate their functions and powers to a public sector employee who has the necessary qualifications and experience to carry out those functions. This is important because the senior practitioner is a statutory appointment of one person who cannot attend to all requests for restrictive practices. We think this is a commonsense and much-needed change to this legislation.

I turn to the *Justices of the Peace Act* and the *Oaths, Affidavits and Declarations Act*. My colleague, the Member for Fong Lim, touched on the fact that justices of the peace and commissioners for oaths have an important role in the community, and sometimes it feels like there are not enough of them. I can vouch for that because often there are people in my community who are looking for a justice of the peace. There is a list of people who you can go and find, but if they are unavailable for some reason, it is difficult. This amendment ensures that we have measures in place with those national police checks enshrined in legislation. We want to make sure that only people who are fit and proper are appointed to these important roles.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

RACISM ERADICATION

WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

The Member for Mulka has put forward a motion that the Assembly:

1. affirms the NT's obligation to prevent racism and racial discrimination under the positive duty law and calls for system-wide action aligned with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement
2. urges the co-design of an NT anti-racism strategy grounded in the National Anti-Racism Framework and in full alignment with the Aboriginal Justice Agreement.

We hope that the government considers the motion that has been put forward by the Member for Mulka.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, the road to hell is paved with good intentions. That is pretty much where we are at on this topic. I prepared to speak on this motion, which then morphed into another motion, which has then morphed into yet another motion on short notice. There is sincerity behind all three versions of those motions, but it has probably flushed out a lack of clarity on the intent behind what is going on.

The Member for Mulka's original motion was divided into two parts. One was calling out racism in its totality and the other was what might be done to reflect on racism, particularly focused on Indigenous people, and regarding the Aboriginal Justice Agreement. The amended motion conflated these two, so we lost the first part of the original motion.

With the best of intentions, the government's amendment—which we are debating now, so I will confine my remarks to that—is a motion that acknowledges harm caused by all forms of racism in a more general form without being prescriptive as to solutions, frameworks, agreements or anything allied to that. That is not to say that we are not supportive of the underlying proposition, but the amendment suggests that the government's position is that it is more important to recognise the entirety of our polity and to broaden the debate.

There is a diversity of opinion in this House on all matters. It is important to remember that, from time to time, the opposition and the crossbench do not operate like one uniform being and neither does the government. At the risk of committing political suicide, I thought the Voice was a pretty good idea and an imperfect step in the right direction. The majority of people in the country disagreed with me and many others, and I respect that is the direction we have gone in now. It appears that the Albanese government, which championed the initiative, has also taken heed of that sentiment and is moving forward accordingly.

In a similarly pragmatic fashion, I will not rage against the machine on a decent motion that has been put forward by the government, which I would like us to pass because it is a good and reasonable motion. By the same token, that is not to diminish the fact that the Member for Mulka specifically wanted us to agree on something that the government, at this point, would like more time to think about.

Having said that, the positive measures that the Member for Mulka outlined are to be lauded. It is a positive thing that we have a man of his stature bringing forward motions to consider racism and what can be practically done to address Indigenous inequality. Rather than tiptoeing around everything, we all need the courage to speak out about the diversity in each of our respective electorates. We all have Indigenous people within our electorates, and we all have electorates that are also filled with multicultural voices, people and faces, which has been the case forever and a day.

The Member for Mulka pointed out that we are not unique in the NT in having to face racism, and that is absolutely the case. I am sorry to hear that he is feeling like he is no longer welcome here. That is a tragic thing to hear; nobody wants to feel that. The Member for Sanderson, in his own way, affirmed the same sentiment.

The idea that everyone is welcome is something we should be getting behind. A starting point is to agree on a baseline proposition before moving forward with how to put things into motion. I am not just interested in talking about motherhood statements either. On 26 March I gave an adjournment speech at length about diversity, multiculturalism and the fact that they are hard-fought gains and do not happen by accident. Laksa festivals do not just happen by accident, and neither does social cohesion or multiculturalism as a state-sponsored policy.

Likewise, I do not think racism disappears by ignoring it and hoping for the best. You have to work actively to encourage people to be tolerant and work together, so I am less libertarian than some of my colleagues in this regard. However, I am more focused on what binds us as common than what divides us. The amendment to the motion by the Attorney-General is a decent one that is asking us to acknowledge harms caused by

racism, to recognise that the government plays a role in supporting a harmonious multicultural society and to call out instances of racial discrimination and, I imagine, discrimination more generally.

The Member for Mulka expressed the sentiment that racism appears to be increasing, which is hard to say. A proposition like that needs to be tested empirically, not just with one-off anecdotal evidence. We all have stories; no one person's voice should be privileged over another. That is why it is not a bad idea to reflect on the data that is relevant in our jurisdiction, so that is what I did, given I am the data guy. I dug up data to use as a baseline in this conversation.

It is much easier to document socioeconomic fragmentation; it is more measurable. It can be done in empirical ways and causality can be assigned, saying that it is the downstream consequence of economic and social policies that have been put in place by multiple governments over a period; you can test it.

As to whether racism is increasing, the first thing to remember is our demographic context. The Northern Territory is the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse place per capita compared with anywhere else in the country. The mix of that is changing over time, but according to the 2021 Census, the case is that 65% of our population is non-Indigenous. It is a good starting point to remember that whilst we proportionally have the largest Indigenous cohort in the country, we also have proportionally more diversity, and we need to accommodate it.

The peak body to look at that and what happens in the discrimination space is the Anti-Discrimination Commission. In its 2023–24 report, 73% of the complainants were of non-Indigenous heritage, noting there was a total of 317 complainants in that cohort. Of that, only 9% of the complaints were race based; a lot more were disability based. What does that tell us? The first thing we notice is that it is a similar trend to past years, and it is trending down slightly. That does not mean racism is going away. It could mean that under-reporting is occurring or there is conflation of various metrics, but it is loosey-goosey to say racism is on the rise. Racism is not necessarily increasing, but it could be. The key thing is to look at the data we have.

The Australian Human Rights Commission's recent work on the National Anti-Racism Framework Scoping Report from 2022 states that people from culturally diverse backgrounds in Australia, including the NT, regularly face racism and systemic discrimination, limiting access to opportunities like housing and employment compared with Anglo-Australians. Ethnic minorities as well as Indigenous people face systemic disadvantage based on the assertion made in the Australian Human Rights Commission's report.

What then of institutional racism within government? As has been alluded to, the 2023 report on the Campaign to Combat Racism by Adjunct Professor David Hollinsworth suggested that there was institutional racism, including unconscious bias and discriminatory practices affecting both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in multicultural communities. We also have evidence in reporting to suggest that we have problems within our civil service in that regard, which is something to look at as well.

Young people are not to be forgotten in this equation. The 2024 report, 'It's up to everyone to call it out', by the NT Children's Commissioner, surveyed 284 children and young people aged eight to 19 across the Territory and found that 80% of them reported having seen or experienced racism and 31% stated they had personally experienced racism. These are young people; it is even more insidious in some ways when young people are experiencing this.

These figures indicate that racism affects a broad spectrum of young people in the NT, possibly including those from multicultural backgrounds. We have a large Asian and South Asian community, and trying to control for the data on racism, disadvantage and discrimination in that community is very hard to do. One of the better places you can probably get some information on that is from the 2021 Asian Australian Alliance survey, which had a sample group of 377 people, reporting that 75% of Asian Australians—that is, non-Indigenous people—experienced heightened racial hostility, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic, including verbal assaults and physical attacks. That is relevant to Asian communities; I am not suggesting that is specific to the Northern Territory situation, but it is notable that we have a large South Asian and Asian population.

The Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion Survey 2021 is also worth thinking about. The Scanlon Foundation, to reiterate for those who may have forgotten, is an independent not-for-profit research institute that exists as a bridge between academic insights and public thought on matters relating to Australia's social cohesion. The Scanlon Foundation survey reports that 27% of Australians from non-Indigenous, culturally diverse backgrounds reported racial discrimination in the past year, with 18% citing skin colour, ethnic origin or race as the reason.

A final one to think about is racism in the workplace because it goes to the core of what was brought up by the Minister for Multicultural Affairs. The 2023 Diversity Council Australia study finds that 43% of non-white, non-Indigenous employees experience racism at work, including exclusion and stereotyping, and only 25% felt that employers actively address it. There is the rub of it—actively addressing it. I am keen on the idea of us actively addressing things rather than hoping that the market will correct for all errors, particularly when it comes to making sure we maintain a harmonious and diverse society.

That is why on 26 March I spoke at length about the fact that it is great we all go to lots of events, take lots of photos and there are lots of costumes. However, it is a privilege that was hard fought, and we have to keep fighting for it together as a group by concentrating on what unites us rather than what divides us in order to move the debate forward. That is why the motion that has been put forward by the government is sincere in its intent.

What does all this data that I am pointing out really mean? The fact is no-one has a monopoly on the wisdom in this area, and I am not seeking to privilege any one voice or perspective. It probably means that you can fairly say, without getting too carried away, that there is significant quantitative data to suggest that discrimination on the grounds of race is a quantifiable proposition. It is silly to suggest that racism is gone, that racism does not matter or that racism has evaporated; likewise, it is silly to suggest that we should do nothing or can do nothing about it.

I am confining that body of data towards evidencing that there is significant quantitative data to suggest that discrimination on the grounds of race is a quantifiable proposition. However, the quantifiable data suggests that it may be a niche proposition, it may be an under-reported proposition or it may not, in fact, be getting worse, although there is plenty in the Zeitgeist at the moment about the increasing social polarisation within Australia and issues with social cohesion. I will not speculate on why that is the case. I am not interested in that part of it, to be honest; I am interested in how we move together as a group.

What then of the qualitative, because the qualitative speaks to the experience, which is probably more important. Based on the original motion that was on the notice paper, I reached out to a broad swathe of multicultural groups and communities around the Territory to say, 'The Member for Mulka is putting up his motion, which may come up some time soon. If you have any thoughts on racism that you might like to let me know about, I will try to feed them into thinking about how I might contribute to this debate sensibly.' I got a lot of specific responses about people's experiences. Sometimes there are specific axes to grind, if I am honest. Sometimes they pointed out that migrants punch down on other migrants. It is a complex system to explain social cohesion and why it may break down.

I picked out one contribution that I got. With the permission of the person who sent it through to me, I will read it out. The contribution is from Mr Mohammed Raziuddin, President of the United Muslims of Northern Territory. I picked him out because all of you are perking up and thinking, 'I know that fellow. He is a decent guy. He has a lot of decent things to say. He does not seem super partisan. He is running a community services organisation.' Yes, he does it under the label of a Muslim group, and as everyone freely knows around here, that is the faith to which I subscribe as well. I reached out to him because I thought his was a nice summary of many of the other contributions that I received.

The contribution I got reads as follows:

'I strongly support the government's focus on looking at harm caused by racism, especially the ongoing impact on our Indigenous communities. I also commend your intention to broaden the debate to reflect on the experiences of multicultural communities in the Northern Territory.

'From lived experience I can share that racism is still a reality for many people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. For instance, I have witnessed international students and new migrants subjected to racial slurs in public places, and even in professional settings individuals have been overlooked or dismissed because of their accent or their appearance.

'In community work I have supported people who have been denied housing or employment opportunities, not because of a lack of qualifications or references but because of preconceived assumptions tied to their name, skin colour or religion.

'One young man confided that he removed all references to his cultural identity from his resume just to get a call back. Others feel they must suppress their identity to fit in and avoid scrutiny.

'Importantly, many of these individuals express admiration and solidarity with First Nations peoples, seeing parallels in their struggle. There is a strong appetite amongst multicultural communities to walk alongside Indigenous Territorians in the fight against all forms of racism, provided there is room in the conversation to share our own realities as well.'

That is put much more eloquently than I would have tried to put across as a statement, and that is why I am grateful to Mr Raziuddin for sharing that statement so that I could read it out.

I can only fairly reflect on my own experience without wanting to prejudice the debate, so all I will say is this. I grew up here as well and, like everybody, have stories of when I sadly experienced discriminatory practice, either directly or indirectly. I do not reflect on them too hard, but I remember that when I left Darwin to move to Sydney, I really understood what discriminatory practice looked like because it was a whole different ecosystem for me personally compared with growing up here. I realised that, relatively speaking, Darwin was something of a Shangri-La. When I moved to England and spent an awfully long time there, I levelled up again on discovering what real racism looks and feels like. I was grateful for my time in Sydney, and I was grateful evermore for my time in Darwin.

I am not here to say that racism has gone away. I am not here to say that we should not actively work together to try to tackle it. I am here to say that we have it pretty good in the Northern Territory and in Darwin relative to a lot of places in the world, and I want us to work together to keep that as the case. Our chances of that happening improve if we respectfully speak to one another in this place. They would probably also improve in the future if we spoke to each other behind the scenes about what we will talk about and did not change the goalposts, which happens all the time in this parliament; it has been happening for 20-odd years.

It does not always have to be that way, but we could find more common ground if we chose to. We would probably find that our social and economic prospects would improve dramatically if we did this, because there is a range of things we will not be able to tackle in isolation in the Northern Territory without the help of the federal government, the cooperation of one another and building bridges with the wider world.

For that reason, I will be voting on the voices with gusto to support the Attorney-General's amendment to this motion. I think it is a laudable objective to acknowledge the harm caused by racism, whether it is based on race, ethnicity, culture or religion; to recognise the government has a role in preventing discrimination and supporting our harmonious multicultural communities; and to call on everyone—which includes all of us—to stand up and call out racism when it occurs.

I thank the Member for Mulka for bringing this matter to the Chamber and for compelling us all to confront it together. It is only by moving forward together that we stand any chance of maintaining the Northern Territory that we all love and have fond memories of as children.

I support the motion and hope we all can unanimously.

Mr O'GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I believe that everyone in this House thinks racism is wrong. I stand with the Member for Mulka for calling out racism in our community, including what he has directly encountered through his own experience. Unfortunately, whether we like it or not, racism exists across the world, always has and sadly will continue.

I can give you many examples from across Europe, the Americas and Asia over the centuries where racism has impacted negatively on many people's lives and has been a contributing factor to wars and conflicts. How can we minimise racism and its impact on people? This is a complex question that I do not have a succinct answer to, and I am not sure anyone else here has either.

I do not believe anyone is born racist. I think they may become racist through their own lived experience, upbringing and values shared with them by their families, friends and local communities. Unfortunately, you cannot fix racism with laws alone. In our freethinking society, we must accept that people have different attitudes, including attitudes that we may personally disagree with. Their lived experience may have influenced them to hold a view contrary to what you and I consider to be acceptable.

I will focus on my electorate of Karama and share some honest yet confronting lived experiences. Some elements of racism occur across and within many of the ethnic communities in my electorate. I am particularly conscious and dismayed that there seems to be a growing divide occurring between some sections of our Indigenous community and other community members in my electorate. That is the reality of what I see.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

COMMUNITY CHOIRS & MUSICAL
GROUPS

WEDNESDAY 21 MAY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

To top it off, Chrispy goes to Thailand every couple of years. She hits me up for a donation. She donates things to an orphanage called Asia Hope. She just goes over there and hangs out with kids and loves them.

On her Facebook page she says, 'Lub my family and friends and fur babies, enjoy cricket and making sure everyone is happy'. We love you, Chrispy, and we are so proud of you.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak on an issue of growing concern about public allegations in relation to the misuse of public funds and mismanagement of conflicts of interest at the Darwin Waterfront Corporation (DWC). I formally announce that I will be referring this matter to the Public Accounts Committee.

Territorians continue to raise their concerns in relation to this matter with me and other members of the Labor Caucus. Since the CLP government continues to refuse calls for an independent investigation, I am compelled to act.

For a government that claims 2025 is its year of action and certainty, turning a blind eye to serious allegations and sweeping them under the rug is the opposite of action and certainty. These allegations are serious. They involve significant sums of public money, and they cannot be allowed to quietly fade into the background.

Among the claims are the alleged creation of a made-up part-time job for Mr Sam Burke, reportedly unadvertised and resulting in a \$60,000 salary increase via a temporary higher duties allowance. The higher duties allowance allegedly continued for up to six years, long after the temporary role ended. There are reports of public service rules being repeatedly breached, with roles not advertised, promotions bypassing merits-based reviews and job evaluation processes ignored for the benefit of certain individuals.

There have also been claims of funds being moved between the Darwin Waterfront Corporation and the AustralAsia Railway Corporation—both taxpayer-funded entities—to support Mr Burke's salary. It has been further alleged that a memo outlines how the DWC would 'recoup' salary costs from AARC, raising concerns of potential fraud and gross conflicts of interest.

It has also been claimed that Mr Burke signed a new four-year executive contract in November 2023 promoting him from ECO1 to ECO2, with a salary of \$259,824 plus benefits. The role was not advertised, it was not subject to the required Job Evaluation System review, and the contract was signed six months before his previous one even expired without clear justification.

I acknowledge that much of this allegedly occurred under the former Labor government, but that does not, and will not, deter me from demanding accountability, because this is not about party lines; it is about public trust, integrity and ensuring that taxpayer dollars are not misused behind closed doors for the benefit of a select few.

These allegations suggest abuse of public resources, nepotism, favouritism, mismanaged conflicts of interest and possible financial misconduct, and more importantly these questions demand answers. I will not accept vague assurances from the Attorney-General, a minister with a poor track record on matters of judgement as a substitute for proper scrutiny.

That is why I am referring the Darwin Waterfront Corporation to the Public Accounts Committee and have this evening written to the Member for Drysdale as Chair of the Public Accounts Committee. I seek leave to table my letter and the accompanying documents that I have sent to the Member for Drysdale.

Leave granted.

Ms UIBO: I urge the government to support the referral, not for my sake, but for the sake of restoring public confidence.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I recognise and celebrate community choirs, as well as some community musical groups. I do so for some very pointed reasons. I have gotten up and recognised art for its economic value in our society a number of times. I have done it for its cultural value. Today I am getting up to talk about its social impact; it is kind of fitting on a day when we have been talking about all sorts of things in relation to social cohesion. Music is a binding and harmonising force, and it does wonders in our society and our polity.

I used the break between the last sittings and this one to get involved in some of our great community musical groups to show support and because, quite frankly, I needed a sanity check. I started off my tour of ensembles with the Darwin Chorale, which has been around for 40 years. It will celebrate its 40th anniversary soon which

is a big deal. For those of you who are looking less interested hearing about the Darwin Chorale now, you all looked super excited on Anzac Day morning when they were the ones singing the national anthem for us and volunteering to provide us a platform to be at that event.

I started off my musical tour there. I note that the foundational choir of the Darwin Chorale, Nora Lewis AM, was this week awarded an honorary doctorate at the Charles Darwin University. Nora, I am terribly sorry; I tried to get leave to come and help award your doctorate, but I was not able to get out of the parliament. It is recognition for her community service over a great many years.

I moved on from there to spend time with the Vocalective, an offshoot group from the Darwin Chorale which does a fantastic high-end super art music. The group did a concert celebrating the music of women composers. It is not the kind of thing we get every day, and it is phenomenal stuff. I want to take a moment to read a tiny snippet or two from their program:

In 2017 on a list of the 50 best conductors of all time, none were women. On the same list in 2023, eight of the top 50 were women. It's a similar state of affairs with composers. The top 20 most frequently performed contemporary works in 2019 were all written by men. In 2022, nine women made the list.

In the world of pop music the situation is completely different. Women are at the forefront ...

The first song we sang out of here—and it was wonderful; we could have all rejoiced in voice in doing it—was by the British composer Ethel Smyth, who was the person who led the suffragette movement in 1910 in support of women's rights. It was wonderful to be involved with something like this and to sing the anthemic music that underpinned it.

I shout out to Shani Bryceson, Leonie Thomson, Fiona Wake, Laura Wade, Annette Anderson, Nora Lewis, Sarah Lynar, Jennifer Rivett, Alastair Burns, Mike Hore, Lee Levett-Olson, Craig McGiffen, David Ray, Greg Anderson, Callum Bowles, Brian Forester and Noah Vladcoff for letting me sing along with them in what was truly a beautiful celebration of music and a moment of great social cohesion.

I went along from there to another great set up, the Arafura Music Collective, which did phenomenally exciting music for a concert in the Anglican Cathedral, featuring Lucy Vallentine, Lily Coats and Sam Vallentine singing jazz a cappella music; a flute and guitar duet, featuring Claire Kilgariff of Kilgariff fame along with Brian Cullan; the Darwin Brass Quintet of Jessica Anderson, Sam Vallentine, Jethro Llewellyn, Kabir Khera and David Parkin; and the Early Music Mob with Bill Grose who is the principal of the NT Music School and Rosemary Antonini. We culminated by celebrating music for the kids by playing the *Bluey* theme, which was fantastic. It was enjoyed by everyone.

I then got the flu, as some of you may have noticed over the last couple of weeks, and for the first time in a decade I was unable to fulfill my musical obligations. At short notice I had to bail out of two concerts, one of which, Member for Johnston, was on Mother's Day. I let down a whole lot of mothers and the Arafura Wind Ensemble by not being able to go to cafe De la Plage. The Arafura Wind Ensemble is the original Palmerston concert band, Member for Blain, as you may recall. I note the Member for Blain and his family were at the event and asked me where I was afterwards.

My thanks to Stephen Peverly, the magnificent clarinettist and conductor of that ensemble, Natalie Chin, who runs the music program at Stuart Park Primary School for inviting me to be part of that, and especially to Rachel Wharem who covered all the songs that I bailed on at the last minute for everyone.

On the other end of the spectrum, I also then had to bail on the Seabreeze Festival, which broke my heart because it is a wonderful event, as the Member for Nightcliff has pointed out. The thing that I wanted to see me part of was the Darwin Beach Choir. Those of you who have not seen the Darwin Beach Choir ...

K McNamara: Yes, I was in it.

Dr RAHMAN: I saw in the video, Member for Nightcliff; I take the interjection.

It is a choir for the musical and tone-deaf alike—what a wonderful ensemble. If any of you have not seen it before, look up Darwin Beach Choir and look online to watch the group singing *You're the Voice* or any of the things they do. It is a bunch of people who come together led by somebody marvellous called Thalia Hewitt, who I do not know and I have not met, but I would like to get involved with that ensemble, and she

brings together people to sing songs in community spaces. It is lovely, heartwarming, healing, fantastic stuff that we should encourage.

I also had to bail on the Hot and Cold Big Band, which was playing on the Legends Stage at the Seabreeze Festival. Fortunately, I was able to join the band on 30 April instead at UNESCO International Jazz Day for a Jazz emergency with the Railway Club when it was one saxophone player short to accompany its swing dancers who do great music and great community building work every week.

I wrapped up my tour of musical things on 7 May by joining the new Navy band, which is stationed in Larrakeyah and starting to form a new ensemble to create new options for our Defence force. So, there is a strategic alignment with me supporting music—chicken wings at Dinah Beach and the Defence agenda. It was fantastic fun to play music with the boys from the Navy.

Nightcliff has the Seabreeze Festival, and it is incomparable. At this time of the year with all the other festivals and events that we have been talking about—how could I compare with Finke or Barunga; the list is long—in earnest, and not to compete with the Nightcliff Seabreeze, in the month of July we will try to initiate the Fong Lim FANFARE Festival. We will have three days of music for the community which ...

A member: Really?

Dr RAHMAN: Yes, we are; watch this space. I am proud to announce tonight, albeit to a small but loyal crowd, that we will be starting a small fledgling festival. I will not give it all away tonight; I will simply say this: I represent an electorate with a lot of cool places to make music that people do not know about—lots of airport hangars, industrial warehouses, microbreweries and gin distilleries, seaside venues and some great schools as well.

We will be focusing, over a three-day period, on dinner dances, a few concerts, and we will also be doing an educational component and some masterclasses for schoolchildren. I am indebted to the many people who are helping me work on this in the background, particularly those coming from further afield to contribute to Darwin's artistic scene over the Dry Season, which is the only time I can lure musicians here from interstate; it is too hot to play any other time.

It will be great fun. I will not say much more about it now. It is a fledgeling first, but I want to demonstrate that, on the smell of an oily rag and with a little bit of electorate allowance help and the community behind us, we will be able to bring life and vitality to my electorate, which is otherwise not just sheet metal fabricators but actually filled with a lot of people who also want to see signs of life and culture and activity.

I would love it if all of any of you are able to make it. I appreciate everybody will have extremely busy calendars at that time of the year, but—touch wood—it will be something for the future and for the ages.

On a serious note, all of these groups are volunteers who contribute to social cohesion. All of these groups are part of the Territory lifestyle.

I will be honest; I am a terrible fisherman. I am allowed to be in charge of sandwiches and music on the boat and never touch any of the tackle or the gear. I grew up here, and the Territory lifestyle was very much about the unbelievable artistic opportunities I had here as a kid. I want to make sure the kids in the future growing also have access to those same opportunities, particularly the ones who are working in the public school system, working with the excellent NT Music School. They require our love and support as well. It is great that we have so many fantastic independent and private schools now as well, but I want to share the love across the entire spectrum. I am pleased to say, without giving too much away, the schools in my electorate will all be joining in my fledgeling enterprise which, touch wood, will go off seamlessly, as all festivals do.

It has been a delight to share this bit of positive news. I look forward to seeing you all at some of the Fong Lim FANFARE Festival.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I am looking forward to the Fong Lim FANFARE.

My adjournment is on a few different topics and typing up some loose ends, but first, as others have done, I recognise that it is National Volunteer Week and thank every volunteer in our community without whom so many of our treasured clubs, events and programs would not exist. I feel incredibly privileged to meet and work with many of these volunteers in my role now.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

SCRUTINY OF LEGISLATION
CONFERENCE 2024

THURSDAY 22 MAY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

no money, and I did not want to tell my work. I was in a harness working on the top of a coal stack for nine hours a day at a coal plant, pregnant. Am I still allowed to make comments about the fossil fuel industry? Of course. In fact, it gives us even more credit.

The thing too that it was something secret or hidden—I talked about our background all the time during my election campaign. Of course, they would not know about it because no-one paid attention to the campaign or The Greens. Fair enough. I talked about it all the time though. I talked to people in the trades and the gas industry. We talked about all the issues about that. I know what it means to rely on something like the gas industry.

I have every right to talk about it and critique it. The idea that they would use that as some type of cheap political stunt is disgusting. For those of you who were shaking heads and rolling your eyes at me, I am sure you were also saying, 'How outrageous to bring family into it'. If you are still holding one rule for them and one for someone else, you had better take a look in the mirror.

I know what it is like to work in hostile workplaces. I know I have a thick skin; you do not work for six years as the only female rigger, literally probably in Australia, without developing a thick skin. I am fine with that and some of the argy-bargy. However, there is a line, and this place and party cross it all the time.

Maybe the other side did too; I was not here. You do not hold yourself to the lowest bar. Some people say to me, 'Look at The Greens, all siding up to Labor all the time'. They treat me like a human being; I did not expect that. I know federally The Greens and Labor hate each other. I came in here expecting that and these people have treated me with respect and dignity and like a human being.

I believe I have also done this to the other side. If there is a time when I have insulted you, show me the *Hansard* and I will apologise ...

A member interjecting.

K McNAMARA: Okay. Please, I welcome it. Personal insults I welcome, I do not believe I have. I have certainly not brought people's families and private lives into this Chamber to score cheap political points.

Now that we have a standard here that bringing families into this is disgusting and a low blow, I welcome that, so I expect an apology from the Deputy Chief Minister, the Member for Barkly and from every one of you who laughed or jeered along with it. If you hold that standard for other people—goddamn!—hold it for yourselves.

Do you know what it is like to come in here and just try to honestly represent my community and do a good job? This is meant to be a discussion of ideas, taking things by their merits. Yes, it gets emotional and there is a bit of political pointscoring, but there is a line. The hypocrisy that you people have shown in this is revolting. Bullies: that is what they call it, don't they, when a group of children gang up on one? I refuse to come into this place and be bullied any longer. I refuse.

Yes, there can be some level of combat here, but for God's sake, that is a line that many of you crossed. I expect and deserve an apology, and I do not want to see this happen again.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, the Australian-New Zealand Scrutiny of Legislation Conference was held in the Parliament of Victoria in December 2024. Several members of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee attended—those being me and the Members for Daly and Wanguri. We were accompanied by the Legislative Assembly Committee Secretary.

It was the intention of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee to submit a formal committee report to the House during the February and March sittings, but unfortunately, owing to changes in Bill scrutiny reporting timeframes, it became impossible because there are, frankly, limitations in the Committees office, with the office being asked to do a lot of things on short notice.

I am pleased to note that there are recent additions to staffing in the Committees area. They are extremely welcome, and I am delighted to see some of them in Chamber right now. I am sure they will help us all in our work on committees.

Consequently, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee members decided to avoid further delay in reporting back to the House, and instead speak to the matter today in adjournment to ensure we can draw

some of the useful things we learned back to the House for the Assembly's benefit. It is serendipitous, because there has been a lot of attention drawn towards matters of scrutiny in this place in recent times.

I seek leave to table four papers arising from that conference: the conference program; the combined jurisdictions report; a paper by Mr Alex Hickman, the Legal Advisory Officer from the WA Legislative Council; and a paper by the Hon Natasha MacLaren-Jones, Member of the Legislative Council, Chair of the Regulation Committee of the New South Wales legislative committees.

Leave granted.

Dr RAHMAN: On the first paper, the breadth of the program speaks to the fact that there is an awful lot to think about beyond nitpicking. A range of stakeholders from all parliaments across the country, as well as New Zealand, were represented. We looked at things like COVID-19 legislation, which came through aggressively, as many of you would remember; emergency legislation, what it is and what it is not; the role and purpose of scrutiny committees; the use of AI in scrutiny committees to pick up on little things, particularly with respect to subordinate and delegated legislation; statutory silence; Henry VIII powers, which everyone should know about; explanatory memoranda; animal rights; life cycle models to involve post-enactment legislative scrutiny; and real versus lip service to things like human rights and democratic processes.

There is a tonne of stuff I could talk about in relation to all of that, but I will leave it to all of you to read the documents and learn yourselves.

In sum, what would be clear to any MLA here who had the benefit of going to that conference is this: large parts of NT process for several terms of government are not following national best practice, let alone international best practice. There is something for us to learn in that.

If we go to the jurisdiction reports, which is the second document I tabled, the first thing you will note is that everyone who attended provided one, except us. That is for a number of reasons, one of which is administrative and practical, but at the same time, we cannot be the outlier jurisdiction in the country repeatedly; we just cannot. It is important that we have a seat at the table at these things and provide information.

In fairness, there was a change of government, so there was a narrow window of time in which to provide that report. There was a technical issue as well. However, we have not participated in a lot of these national or international fora for a number of years. We need to build bridges with the rest of the country and let them know what we are up to if we want to be assisted by them.

If you look at the jurisdiction reports you will learn a lot, and you will learn that activity in all states and territories varies wildly. Suffice to say, scrutiny plays a much more significant role in every other jurisdiction other than ours. That is not surprising considering we did not even have a scrutiny committee for the last four years. I am delighted we at least have one now.

Look at the Commonwealth; it has three scrutiny committees, essentially. If you look at the five-year statistics, you will find that it picks up a lot of problems with laws. That is the Commonwealth, with all its money and resources, and all its time to make good laws. Still, after all that, roughly 25% of all Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation assessments find a problem, and more than 50% Senate Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Bills assessments find problems. You do not want to pass laws with holes and problems in them. That is why Westminster systems around the world have scrutiny committees with a range of functions.

I will focus on only two of them that I want us to try to corral around, because they are positive things that would improve things for everyone in here in respect of all the laws we are making. The first one pertains to the third paper I tabled. It is a paper by Mr Alex Hickman, who is the Legal Advisory Officer from the WA Legislative Council. He has written a paper called 'Explanatory Memorandums for Proposed Legislation in Australia: Are They Fulfilling Their Purpose?' It is a good thing to read.

Here is the key thing to understand about it. A number of the jurisdiction reports I am talking about highlight the fact that there are challenges of both primary and subordinate legislation when explanatory statements and tabling notes are variable and sometimes, regrettably, have extremely poor quality.

The Northern Territory has a legislation handbook that provides some guidance, but the fact remains that some of our explanatory statements ain't amazing either. If you compare some of our recent ones, Serial 18

versus Serial 13 of this year, you see that one is 127 words on one page and tells you nothing; the other is 14,000 words and 16 pages long. We have a problem there, right?

They are both much better than Serial 125 from 2024, which the Minister for Alcohol Policy was in charge of. Ironically it reads like somebody was drunk when they were drafting it because it contains the words, 'consemotion', 'aemployee', 'complay' and 'coluse', which I think are meant to be consumption of alcohol, employee, compliant and clause. It is laughable that we would have this level of mistakes in legislative documents.

Why does this matter? It matters because the judiciary relies on these documents alongside second reading speeches to interpret our laws and to understand the intent of why we are passing laws, but before we can even get to that stage it is difficult to scrutinise the Bill without the comprehensive explanatory documents that support it.

Andrew Hickman suggests that merely paraphrasing the Bill clauses is insufficient. We need background, context, rationale and identification of Henry VIII clauses, and what he suggests is the best-practice environment in the country is the Queensland Parliament. Maybe we could look at what they are doing in Queensland with explanatory memoranda as guidance in that regard.

I will not paraphrase the whole paper, but essentially this guy's work is based on his PhD. He spent forever thinking about these issues, and his critique involves looking at Westminster systems everywhere as well as surveys of parliamentary staff across every parliament in the country. It teaches you a lot, including the fact that explanatory memorandums have only been used widely since the 1980s. Previously they were used only for complex Bills. It is important, as we recognised yesterday, with the passing of the Attorney-General's omnibus Bill—unanimously on the voices, I might add—that we agree that laws and legal processes cannot remain static; we have to adapt to the times.

The final paper I submitted is called 'Breaking New Ground: Expanding the Scrutiny Function of the New South Wales Legislative Council's Regulations Committee'. It is drafted by the Liberal Upper House member, Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones. It was based on the 2020 report that asked them to inquire into the making of delegated legislation, and it led to the creation of bipartisan support for the creation of a regulation committee chaired by the opposition with self-referral powers and expanded remit to look at all legislative instruments regardless of their form.

Further work was done in 2022, and the key thing I draw attention to is recommendation 9, which asked that a dedicated legal adviser be appointed to support the regulation committee in its technical scrutiny function. Suffice to say, there may be merit in this legislature also starting to consider the merits of having dedicated legal resources in-house, independent of the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, to assist the Legislative Scrutiny Committee with its work but also the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee with its work—perhaps one that could even contribute towards guiding legislative drafting instructions when we are so required to undertake such tasks under the terms of inquiry terms of reference.

We are lucky, but quite vulnerable, when it comes to seeking guidance from external counsel when deliberating. If it was not for the assistance of Professor Ned Aughterson, a number of us would frankly be at a loose end in a lot of our committee deliberations.

In closing, I will reflect on a couple of sentiments. One was by Lynda Voltze, the long-serving New South Wales MLC and MLA Member for Auburn, who is widely respected for the fact that she has been in the game for so long. She has noted that scrutiny committees are only as robust as the democratic processes that surround them. She did so talking about the famous 1987 Fitzgerald Inquiry, which all of you should look at if you do not know about the about inevitable tendencies towards corruption unless you invest in scrutiny.

Finally, I would say in the words of the Hon Robert French, former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia:

The importance of pre-enactment scrutiny... cannot be underestimated. It is obviously far better to address problems of unintended legislative overreach, doubtful expression or impact on basic rights and freedoms that the pre-enactment stage, than to rely on the mitigating effects of judicial interpretation.

I am pleased that this government has restored the scrutiny committee after it was removed by the last government. I encourage my fellow parliamentarians to reflect on these documents I have provided tonight to consider practical ways in which our jurisdiction might take more positive steps in the direction of strengthening our democratic governance.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

BERRIMAH ROAD DUPLICATION

TUESDAY 29 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

I thank the Member for Fong Lim for raising concerns on behalf of the petitioners.

Petition No 14 – Immediate Resurfacing of the Entire Length of Boulter Road, Berrimah

The DEPUTY CLERK: Honourable members, a response to Petition Number 14 has been received from the Minister for Logistics and Infrastructure. It has been forwarded to the member for distribution to the petitioners.

Thank you for your letter dated 22 May 2025 providing the terms of Petition Number 14, presented in the Legislative Assembly regarding the resurfacing of Boulter Road.

Boulter Road is identified as a strategic link in the Berrimah North Area Plan, established by the Northern Territory Planning Commission. As the area develops it will require future upgrades to accommodate increasing traffic volumes. Upgrading Boulter Road will require detailed planning, design and dedicated capital funding.

Boulter Road is under the care and control of the City of Darwin. Boulter Road was originally constructed as a rural profile road. As such, it lacks footpaths due to the presence of open, unlined drains along the verges. Boulter Road's surface is currently in poor condition, with extensive patching, cracking and recurring potholes during the Wet Season. I am informed that the City of Darwin installed streetlighting to improve the safety of Boulter Road.

Potential resurfacing via a reseal is an appropriate interim treatment to seal cracks and minimise pothole formation during the Wet Season. I am advised that an order of cost estimate to complete resealing of the full length of Boulter Road is approximately \$250,000.

The Department of Logistics and Infrastructure is upgrading the Amy Johnson Avenue and Boulter Road intersection to improve road safety, meet increased traffic demands and improve streetlighting. Amy Johnson Avenue is a government-managed road. The primary objective of the project is to provide a 3.5-metre-wide auxiliary left turn lane from Amy Johnson Avenue onto Boulter Road to improve safety for road users. Construction works are expected to commence in August 2025 and be completed within the current Dry Season.

I will provide notification of this petition and my response to the City of Darwin and continue discussions with the City of Darwin on these priority upgrades to be considered in future funding arrangements.

MOTION

Note Petition No 10 – Opposing the Berrimah Road Duplication Project

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the petition be noted.

This petition regarding the Berrimah Road duplication project is now, in fact, a settled matter. The Treasurer has, as part of his reprioritisation of infrastructure projects, recognised that this matter is not a priority. Notwithstanding, it is worth discussing, particularly in the context of what is infrastructure of necessity, because this initiative is indicative of the lack of a cohesive approach to decisions that were made on infrastructure by the preceding government over a long period. This is why we are dealing with the legacy of ill-conceived ventures such as this.

Without delving too deeply into it, I begin by drawing upon the impact statement regarding the proposed duplication because I think it speaks volumes. With the permission of the Principal of Haileybury Rendall School, Mr Andrew McGregor, I will draw out a couple of key points that were made regarding this project.

These community advocates, representatives of the school community, asked the Northern Territory Government to seriously reconsider this development and see it cancelled or, at the least, suspended for a time so that the school and surrounding businesses could be provided certainty regarding whether to move forward with a range of things. The impact of the proposed duplication would have been devastating to the school environment, businesses and 4,000 community members in that area. They had seen plans that suggested that a strip of varying widths, between five and 10 metres, running almost 800 metres along that property would be taken out on the edge of Berrimah Road.

There were a number of areas of concern as to why this might be a problem. They are worth recognising in their own right in order to understand why this was ever on the books. Firstly, there was the strategic planning impact of this initiative. The school and its board had considered that no serious consideration had been

given to the drastic impact of the proposal and that, equally, no form of amelioration or proper compensation had been considered, which is astonishing. Apart from other serious concerns due to the risk of the project, the board had to freeze all its capital expenditure until all aspects of the duplication matter were resolved, which is a significant thing for it to have to do.

Secondly, the board was concerned about the environmental impact, which was significant. Those of you who know Berrimah Road will know that there is an avenue of big old trees, and 70 to 80 mature trees and bushes would have to be removed from the property with no opportunity to preserve that land or to replace those trees. That barrier of trees not only was aesthetically pleasing and environmentally friendly but also reduced the impact of air and noise pollution to 1,300 staff and students who are on the campus. The health risks attendant with that was a whole different set of concerns. Increased air pollution would have come with increased truck traffic in that area if you essentially doubled the width of that road.

On the infrastructure impact itself, what was the infrastructure case for it and why were we doing this? It is difficult to know. Again, the extensive loss of land could have been in the order of 5,000 square metres. As well as destroying vegetation, that encroachment would have decimated the parking and traffic flow arrangements on the site; eight to 10 buses would have come off the site every day, twice a day; as well as 100 lost car parks for which there was no strategy to replace.

The traffic and flow disruption in drop-offs and school pickups would mean the entire facility would pretty much have to be redesigned. The cost would have run into the millions.

Again, what regard was given to safety concerns? There have already been vehicle crashes through the fence on that property close to where students play and where families and staff walk, and there was real fear that increased traffic flow in that area would lead to further accidents that would affect the community. Numerous students in that space also cycle to and from school, and there was no provision for what was to be done if they lost the external footpath leading to the school.

The impact on teaching and learning, of course, would have been significant as well. The traffic on Berrimah Road is already noisy and affects conversations and hearing on that side of the school. If you brought the road any closer to the classrooms and removed the natural barrier of the trees, you would see a great increase in noise pollution which, frankly speaking, the school was right in suggesting would affect its core business of teaching and learning.

There was a significant case to be made also for the genuine disruption and threat to the school's business model. I remind you what a significant and important school Haileybury Rendall School is in terms of a high-performance private school. We do not have a tonne of them, and this is an extremely well-performing one. We are looking at essentially knocking out its ovals, car parks, trees and business model—for what? Seriously, for what? That is my question to the Assembly.

The financial impact is not insignificant either. Haileybury Rendall School alone, as a stakeholder in that space, spent tens of thousands of dollars planning how to deal with the potential duplication occurring. That included legal fees, the cost of traffic engineers and future design costs. There was never any indication, from the time I have been involved with this, that there would be any compensation for these expenses or that compensation had even been clearly countenanced or calculated.

Then you have the loss of trees, roads, the car park and roadways that need to be replaced and all the new internal roads and infrastructure that would be needed. There was also extensive loss of land. The estimate was that compensation required would run into several millions of dollars in order to simply go ahead with the project.

The reason I raised this, given it is a settled matter, is that it is a fair question to ask how on Earth this initiative ever got to this stage. How is it the case that anybody thought it was a good idea in the last government to do this duplication? Quite seriously, I am still dissatisfied with the answers I had to that question. Part of the reason I entertained debating this is that I welcome contribution from a member of the former government to at least explain the business case underpinning what was going on there or, if they cannot do that, at least the essential underlying logic. What supported the logic behind the Berrimah Road duplication?

The key stakeholders in that space, including one of the most significant senior secondary private schools, and a tonne of businesses up and down that area, could not see the logic behind it. I have given long and interesting—in my mind anyway—speeches about the state of infrastructure, the poor choices that have been made and the *Utopia*-esque folly we have descended into over a long period.

This appears to be one of those projects that was just announced at a time that seemed to make thinly veiled sense—doubling the width of the road will be helpful for going out to East Arm. I do not see where the logic was underpinning this project.

I am here not just to ask that the petition be noted which, of course, we will formally do, but also for us to genuinely contemplate why we build infrastructure, where we put it, what is essential and enabling and what is vanity nonsense.

The Treasurer had to make cuts to the infrastructure spend. Remember a lot of those cuts were literally wiping nonsense off the books—things that were announced with a funding tag attached to them that did not result in anything being built or any money being appropriated or allocated to build these projects.

I have said it over and again: we will not go forward in this place on a range of big issues unless we can work cooperatively. The fact of the matter is that the federal government will not listen to us unless we all sing with one voice about what we would like the money for. What do we want to build? Where do we want to build it? Why do we need it?

This is an opportunity to reflect on something that, frankly speaking, had no sound business case that I could possibly tell, no money underpinning it, no community support, zero stakeholder engagement and no consultation with the relevant parties. It is important to do meaningful consultation. I take it seriously when the opposition and crossbenchers ask the government to engage in meaningful consultation. As a result, I think it is incumbent on you to also recognise that consultation was done poorly in respect to this initiative.

It is a settled matter. It is great that it is not going ahead and that Berrimah Northcrest has the certainty to continue doing good educational work in the place it operates from. It is also an opportunity for us to accept that this was not a good idea. It was indicative of how badly government was running infrastructure.

For all the potshots that are taken at my learned colleague and Treasurer, he has not wiped infrastructure off the books. He has started to wipe nonsense off the books that never had any money attached. With the money we have left, we need to be smarter about what we build because the return on investment for a lot of these things has been negligible to zero; whereas, we could be investing in smart projects, like the one I championed—the Stuart Park high street—which would have a fast return on investment for the Territory.

I will be grateful for a contribution from the members of the former government to explain the logic underpinning why this initiative—if you can call it that—ever got to this stage. If the opposition chooses not to speak, I will take it as tacit acknowledgement that we all agree finally that this was a dumb idea. Hopefully we can move forward to making smarter choices on infrastructure as a parliament.

Mr YAN (Logistics and Infrastructure): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the Member for Fong Lim for his input into this important petition. The key stakeholders of this project have made it clear that the Berrimah Road duplication was not something that they supported. The CLP government has listened. That is the difference between us and those opposite. Labor did not listen and the community paid the price for that.

I went to Haileybury School to hear the concerns firsthand. They did not mince their words. They raised serious, thoughtful and valid points. It was not just the management and the principal of Haileybury Rendall School; it was the students as well. It was clear that the previous government had not given them the time or respect to properly engage.

Local businesses in the area simply had enough. They had endured disruption, delays and detours for nearly two-and-a-half years, all thanks to the chaos that was the big, overpromised plan from the Labor government.

Their lifeline of access to their customers was cut off without warning or proper consultation. Their trade took a massive hit, and their confidence in government planning was shaken. That is unacceptable. Let me be clear: that ends now.

The CLP government will not stand by and watch Territory businesses become collateral damage from bureaucratic mismanagement. We stand with businesses. We are not in their way.

Icons of the Territory community, like Tommo's Pies, rely on predictable traffic, safe access and a government that listens. When I advised the owner that this project was off the table, the sense of their relief was instant. Since then, my office has become a more regular customer of Tommo's Pies. It is now a ritual for my office during sitting weeks.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

NZ GLOBAL WORKER ATTRACTION

TUESDAY 29 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Yet time and again, this government has pursued decisions without consultation, transparency and any respect for Aboriginal self-determination.

The funding that props up the Northern Territory budget, Commonwealth funding intended to support Aboriginal communities, is being undermined by Northern Territory laws and policies that work against the interest of those communities. When this government was asked in Estimates to account for how that money was being spent, it could not answer. This is not just a betrayal; it is a mismanagement of public money.

This issue runs even deeper. Racism in the Northern Territory justice and policing systems has become a crisis. The recent joint land council meeting called for an independent police misconduct body, for the full implementation of the Kumanjayi Walker coronial inquest recommendations and public consultations into the youth justice reforms; these are not unreasonable demands.

Let me say this plainly: a government that punishes Aboriginal people for existing, speaking up and seeking justice is not fit to say that it is here for the whole community. This government insists it is not racist, but any government that refuses to address structural inequality and systemic racism cannot claim to govern for everyone.

I want to be clear, because there has been a lot of misinformation about systemic racism. It does not mean that individuals are racist; it means the systems and policies in place produce unequal outcomes for people of different races, whether or not that is the intention. That is exactly what we are seeing across policing, youth justice, health, housing and land management. Aboriginal people are bearing the brunt of decisions made without them and too often against them. When the land councils call for something like a co-designed inquiry into structural racism in the Northern Territory Police Force, this government must not walk away.

I say to the Chief Minister and every member of the CLP: you may think you can win another election by dividing people, but there is no future for a government that denies more than one-third of its population a seat at the table. As the Tiwi Land Council Chair, Leslie Tungatalum, said:

Between us we own more than half of the Territory's land and 85 per cent of the coastline. Any government that ignores and harms our fast-growing population may win an election or two, but it has no future ...

The Member for Mulka's censure motion is not symbolic. Everyone in this House knows and has heard him, now in his third term, speak over and again in a generous way about how he wants to work with people in government to bring justice to address the issues we all know are of great concern. Over and again, his offer is not met. He did not bring this motion lightly. It is a signal from him, the land councils and Territorians that we all deserve better. We deserve a government that listens, includes and governs for every person in the Northern Territory—not a government of division or a government that says, 'I am governing for the community, and if you do not like it you can just go away'.

I am disappointed that we did not have the opportunity to discuss this motion today. I would have appreciated hearing what the government would say about it.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to be part of a government that is reconnecting strategically to Asia, specifically in relation to trade and investment. Sadly, the minister in that realm can only be in one place at a time, so I was delighted to deputise for the minister this past weekend to support our Global Worker Attraction Campaign in New Zealand.

I was the small part of a larger team—Team NT. We had from people from across the Northern Territory Government in the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations; the Department of Children and Families; the Department of Corrections; and the NT Police Force. More importantly, in some ways, we had lots of representatives of industry, all of whom felt it important enough to be there. We had industry representatives from Hospitality NT, NTCOSS, WoSSCA, NT Shelter, NT Mental Health Coalition, Primary Health Network, the ICT Industry Association, the Motor Trade Association, the Civil Contractors Federation and the Chamber of Commerce.

In my past professional life when I advised on how to grow workforce and population, I have been extremely critical of these kinds of ventures. A lot of the time they do not represent good return on investment and, quite frankly, they are just junkets to a foreign land. I am pleased to say that on this occasion that is not how I felt at all. This was a well-executed, well-targeted engagement that will deliver a real return on investment for the north of Australia. That is why it is important to speak about it for the benefit of everyone in the House.

There were high levels of stakeholder engagement, with promising candidates in the sessions that we conducted in New Zealand. The presenters were extremely busy throughout the two days I was in Auckland; but, by all accounts, they were even busier in Christchurch when they had a small window and were basically run off their feet the whole time with people from New Zealand who are genuinely interested in coming to work in the Northern Territory in a range of sectors.

What is the purpose of these engagements? It is to connect overseas jobseekers with local opportunities and raise awareness about the NT as a place to work and live. We could all do well to look at these glossy brochures, because a lot of work goes into them and we should all be singing off the same song sheet when we are trying to fly the flag for the Northern Territory. This is excellent collateral that has been created.

The key reason I say this was a well-targeted engagement is that New Zealand has been a key labour source country for Australia and the Northern Territory for a decade-plus. In 2024 alone, 30,000 New Zealanders moved to Australia—the highest figure in decades—and 35% of those people were foreign born, which also has something to say for how we treat multicultural and diversity policy in this country.

It is not just relevant to Darwin. Madam Speaker, you may be pleased to know that the suburb with the highest percentage of people born in New Zealand in the NT is in fact Araluen. Araluen has 5.1% New Zealand-born representation.

These New Zealanders are not just concentrated in a little backpacker corner of Darwin; they are spread across the Territory, and they engage in and work in sectors that are important to all of us. It is in no small part because New Zealand citizens have automatic work rights when they enter Australia under what is called an SCV (Special Category visa), which since 1 July 2023 allows New Zealanders to be considered for PR and qualify for citizenship after they have been in the country for four years. Between July 2023 and July 2025, 92,000 New Zealand citizens applied for Australian citizenship. Think about it; that is a significant number of people who are interested in coming here. Of these, 48% were born outside of New Zealand. Again, this says something to us about diversity.

I had the opportunity while I was in New Zealand to fly the flag not just in person but also briefly on Radio New Zealand. That led me to look into Radio New Zealand and the stories it is prosecuting at the moment. The reason Radio New Zealand was interested in our story was it wanted to know: 'Why are you nicking all our New Zealanders, and why are New Zealanders seeking to leave?' It is an age-old conversation about brain drain and brain circulation.

I turn you to a recent media piece by Radio New Zealand called, 'Revealed: Number of migrants using NZ as a stepping stone to Australia'. We have to be wise to these kinds of things if we are trying to grow our population in a sustainable way. In that article a scion of population geography, Emeritus Professor Richard Bedford, whom I had the pleasure to meet many years ago in my academic life—he has been working on immigration in New Zealand since the 1960s—had interesting things to say that are worth reflecting on for everyone in the House. I will quote from it briefly. He said:

We need to take very seriously the factors that attract skilled migrants. It's not always about money, but money is a big one.

We must ensure that highly skilled migrants we bring in get good jobs and are well paid. But we're a small country with a smaller economy, and we can't compete on everything.

What we can offer is a good lifestyle, a welcoming environment, and a strong sense of community, things that also matter to many migrants.

Richard Bedford also said:

... the real challenge was making New Zealand a place people want to stay.

Not just with good pay, but with access to housing, a welcoming culture, and opportunities. If we want migrants to commit to staying, we have to make it worth their while beyond just the job offer.

Does that sound familiar to anyone in the House? Is anyone cottoning on to the parallel here? New Zealand is to Australia as the Northern Territory is to the rest of the states and territories of this country. If you want to attract people to a place that is one thing, but if you want to retain them you have to focus on a whole different set of metrics. Therefore, it is a smart option to go to a place like New Zealand, fly the flag and try to encourage people to live and work here.

You will find in that Radio New Zealand piece that I had a brief engagement with our police industry representatives who were there, talking about the fact that they have lots of experienced and up-and-coming police who are keen to work here. It was the same with correctional services officers.

I think we will all appreciate that we could use labour force support across a range of sectors. What are those sectors? We were flying the flag for ICT and digital, automotive, civil construction and infrastructure, correctional services, law and order, hospitality and tourism, primary healthcare, social services and child protection and community and mental health services.

Everybody there was doing real work that mattered and will make a quantifiable difference to the Northern Territory. Chief amongst them, I thank Geoff Totham and Scott Healey from the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations who coordinated the whole event and did a stand-up job of keeping the whole thing humming smoothly.

I worked with Geoff on a number of the sessions where he would give a presentation talking about location, population, climate, the outdoors, lifestyle, education, health, cost of living, rental costs, property prices and wages. He gave detailed information to give the people coming in to have a listen a real apples-with-apples comparison in data. What does it cost you to buy a meat pie in this place versus that place? What does it cost you to rent in this place versus that place? That is the kind of targeted engagement you need to do if you want to attract people and have a fighting chance of retaining them in the future.

Another person I think deserves a shout-out is Kelly Abrahams from Migration NT. Migration NT has been undervalued, in my opinion, over a long period by successive governments. It does a lot of heavy lifting in trying to channel workforce into the Northern Territory. Migration NT has an abundance of work to do, and probably nobody was more run off their feet at that engagement than Kelly, who spent her whole time essentially answering visa questions in relation to skilled migration pathways for non-New Zealand residents as well. That includes things like the employer-sponsored NT DAMA, the subclass 482 and 494 visas and the subclass 491 Territory-sponsored, Territory-nominated general skilled migration places.

I will say until I am blue in the face and until you all wake up to the reality of it that we are not solving any problems without more people here. It is as simple as that. That means we need to get law and order under control. It also means that we will need to think about demographic growth to support sustainable economic growth. Otherwise, we will just be shuffling deckchairs on the *Titanic*. Therefore, it is important that we are connecting to Asia, building strategic linkages in relation to trade and investment and using our precious dollars to target sensibly to try to promote sustainable demographic growth to support sustainable economic growth.

I am grateful that the minister was way too busy on this occasion to go. I enjoyed attending this event to see firsthand the hard work that our public servants are doing in the face of trying circumstances a lot of the time. I commend Team NT on their work. I thank the minister for the opportunity to attend.

I encourage you all to take a look into the Global Worker Attraction Campaign and platforms like WorkerConnect, which we use to try to bolster our local workforce.

Mr PAECH (Gwoja): Madam Speaker, tonight I acknowledge the amazing contributions and the award winners of the Northern Territory Music Awards. On 27 June in Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Music NT hosted the Northern Territory Music Awards. It was a time to celebrate the incredible talent and achievement that makes up the Northern Territory's rich and diverse music scene.

Music in the Territory is not just about sound; it is about stories, the beat of culture, the voice of community and the spirit of country. Whether it is sung in Yolngu Matha, shouted at the stage from a Darwin venue or shared around a campfire under the stars of the Territory's skies, NT music is bold, beautiful and utterly unique.

We honoured the artists, songwriters, producers, sound techs and festival teams who bring magic to life in the music space. I begin by congratulating the winners of the NT song of the year, Rrawun Maymuru and Nick Wales, for their powerful and moving work, *Yolngu*. This song is not just a standout piece of music; it is a spiritual journey, deeply grounded in language and culture. It is a reminder of the strength and pride that runs through the deepest First Nations hearts and voices.

Congratulations to the Blues and Roots winners, the Andrew Gurruwiwi Band which had an amazing song, *Yaa Djamarkuli*, a groove that carries the unmistakable pulse of community and connection. For Country we heard the heartfelt storytelling of Tom Curtain and his collaborators through *Good Life*, a song that



NORTHERN TERRITORY
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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

LCAC VAD FIRST INTERIM REPORT

WEDNESDAY 30 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mr O’Gallagher
Mr Patel
Dr Rahman
Mr Yan
Mrs Zio

Motion not agreed to.

SPEAKER’S STATEMENT
Cameras in Gallery

Madam SPEAKER: For the information of guests in the gallery, cameras are not allowed to be used. That has been addressed. It is one of the rules of this parliamentary Chamber.

PAPER TABLED
Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory – First Interim Report

Dr RAHMAN (Chair of Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee report, Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory – First Interim Report, and associated minutes of proceedings.

Voluntary assisted dying is a complex issue that raises difficult and challenging questions for individuals, groups and society as a whole. What is clear, though, is that it remains an unresolved subject matter in the Northern Territory and a matter of significant interest for Territorians. With that in mind, the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee is pleased to have the opportunity to progress resolution of the issue in our polity.

I am pleased, as Chair of the committee, to present this first interim report on VAD in the Northern Territory to the Legislative Assembly and the public at large as testament to the work undertaken to date by the committee to address the VAD inquiry terms of reference provided to us by the Attorney-General. The committee has been working cooperatively and constructively, ably assisted by the secretariat to produce this document and ancillary materials in a timely fashion.

We remain committed to engaging with the issues at hand systematically and fairly and communicating our work regularly to keep Territorians abreast of our progress.

We trust the report will be of assistance to interested parties.

Madam Speaker, I move that the report be noted.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I proudly speak about a special occasion for the Djalkiripuyngu people across the Blue Mud Bay area, located on the Gulf of Carpentaria in north-east Arnhem Land. Today, 30 July 2025, marks the 17th anniversary of the historic decision by the High Court of Australia to grant the Djalkiripuyngu traditional owners their hard-fought native title rights to the intertidal waters of Blue Mud Bay in 2008.

This decision stands as one of the most significant affirmations of Aboriginal legal rights in Australian history, a decision which subsequently led to the inclusion of intertidal waters within the boundaries of land covered by the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*. This significant change for Australia came from the remote coastline of the Northern Territory. The outcome of this case is a testament to the ongoing strength of the Djalkiripuyngu traditional owners, Yolngu people and Aboriginal Territorians when it comes to having their say about what happens on their country and their sea country.

Last year the Member for Daly and I had the immense privilege of welcoming a delegation of leaders from Blue Mud Bay, including Dr Djambawa Marawili AM and Waka Mununggurr, to perform ceremony at the



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HANSARD EXTRACT

FANFARE FESTIVAL!

WEDNESDAY 30 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

This story also connects clans and country across Blue Mud Bay, linking three peninsulas: Garra-para of the Dhalwangu clan; Baniyala of the Madarrpa clan; and Djarrakpi of the Mangalili clan. It illustrates the connections between places and patterns that form the basis for sea rights.

I highly recommend that anyone in this Assembly and anyone who is listening who can visit this beautiful part of the Territory that is Blue Mud Bay and Baniyala takes the chance to view this living sculpture. It is a highlight and an incredible experience when it coincides with the sea rights anniversary celebrations. The celebrations were held in Baniyala today. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend as the proud local member, but I have been to those celebrations in the past and they are special. That is when you get to see this living memorial and Baniyala itself become the epicentre of cultural performances and the passing on of knowledge of the ancestral songs and dances for sea country. This truly showcases the Djalkiripuyngu leaders' rights to the cultural and economic management of their country over thousands of generations.

In closing, I congratulate the Djalkiripuyngu leaders on another successful anniversary of sea rights. I hope to attend their fantastic celebrations in Baniyala next year. Congratulations to the Blue Mud Bay leaders on 17 years of sea rights.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, I will be quick. I have a very special guy in my electorate who has a birthday today. Jason, if you are watching, happy birthday. If I get my maths right, you are turning 20. Happy 20th, and I hope you have a great one. Cheers.

Madam SPEAKER: Wow, that was brief.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, members may recall that on 21 May I foreshadowed my intention to launch a fledgling music festival in my electorate. It is my great pleasure to report tonight on the inaugural Fong Lim Fanfare Festival, held from 4 to 6 July.

The purpose of the festival was manifold but primarily to bring some joy and vitality to my electorate via celebration of band music. The festival was presented under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and delivered in association with partners from the University of Sydney's Sydney Conservatorium of Music, Sydney Grammar School, Dinah Beach Cruising Yacht Association, Ton's Bistro @ Dinah, Haileybury Rendall School, Northern Territory Music School, Australian American Association and Government House.

I thank the branch president of the CPA for allowing us to raise the profile of the CPA with branding across all these events. As I have pointed out, the CPA is a powerful organisation that we all belong to across countries, and we could all do well to have more involvement with it.

The mini festival we ran over a few days featured three exciting performances by the renowned 21-piece jazz big band Dr V's Swing Thing from Sydney. That was led by acclaimed saxophonist, band leader, conductor, educator and composer Mr David Theak, who is the leader of the jazz performance program at the University of Sydney and one of the giants of Australian jazz and music generally. We were blessed to have him and a range of other people volunteer their time to come from interstate, put on a three-day music festival and spread a bit of joy.

We ran three events over three days. They were all different and, I am pleased to report, all successful.

On 4 July, at my beloved Dinah Beach Cruising Yacht Association, we did an event called Swing, Swing, Swing! We had a glamorous Territory formal 4 July dinner dance. Guests were invited to dress up, dine and dance the night away to the sounds of classic Rat Pack tunes. It was quite the contrast; we had ballgowns versus the beloved crusty barnacles in hi-vis at the Dinah Beach Yacht Club, but it was proof that the Dinah Beach Yacht Club scrubs up all right as well.

It was a sold-out event with tonnes of swing dancers, amazing food service by Ton's Bistro, which I commend for being short-listed for a bunch of catering awards recently. It even made a modest start towards fundraising for the new pontoon that Dinah Beach is seeking to replace, which is an essential piece of infrastructure that is important to all mariners in the Northern Territory.

It was also a useful opportunity to build bridges with the Australian American Association and the US Marines who are part of our society here and often do not have terribly much to do with civil society. I was pleased to see that some off-duty people came to help us enjoy the event.

On 5 July at Government House we held a special outdoor terrace concert hosted by Professor the Honourable Hugh Heggie AO, PSM to support the Administrator in recognising the contributions of community musical volunteers. There were about 150 of those volunteers from organisations and ensembles, including the Darwin City Brass Band; Hot and Cold Big Band; Darwin Beach Choir; Darwin Chorale, which recently celebrates its 40th anniversary; the Army Band of the 1st Brigade; the new Royal Australian Navy Band; Vocalective Singers; Darwin Symphony Orchestra; Arafura Wind Ensemble; and Arafura Music Collective.

I was delighted to also see the Members for Port Darwin and Johnston at the concert. Thank you so much for coming down. It was wonderful to have parliamentary colleagues there. I note, of course, that everybody else was more or less at the Alice Springs Show. I could not compete with the Alice Springs Show, so fair dues to those of you who could not make it, and thank you to those of you who could.

It is fair to say that it was a well-received event. The first response of a lot of the people who were contracted by those organisations was, 'You want me to play at what when?' It was a case of, 'No, we want you to sit in the audience and for once be thanked for the contribution you make towards social cohesion, art, culture and the economic impact of the arts'. It was nice for a lot of those people who sing the national anthem for us at all the events, fly the flag for us and make these event happen to have an opportunity to be recognised.

Again, it was a good opportunity to fly the flag for the CPA and for people to ask, 'What is the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association? How is it involved with these initiatives?' I might add that cultural exchange programs through the CPA are a core part of its business.

The third event we ran was on the following day, 6 July, entitled Dave Theak's Jazz Jamboree. We did an interactive holiday masterclass and performance aimed at inspiring our next generation of young artists, particularly musicians. As some of you know, growing up in Darwin I benefited from an amazing musical education. I fondly recall the excitement of watching touring band performances. Our hope was to provide something similarly fun and inspiring for young and old alike.

I am pleased to say that even though we had slightly smaller numbers than we had hoped for, every kid who turned up would have walked away inspired and with something to aim for. A series of kids, who all play in our public schools and some of our private schools as well, were all able to sit in on an interactive masterclass to learn from some of the best people in the country in what was a privileged opportunity. I was delighted to put on that event for a select few because it made a profound difference to the people who could attend the event.

My priority will always be, first and foremost, delivering for my electorate, but it is worth noting the economic footprint of this modest event. A conservative estimate would be that I generated, in partnership with all the people who contributed their time, a six-figure contribution to our GSP (gross state product) from a three-figure investment in operating costs. That is basically a return on investment of a thousandfold-plus, notwithstanding the absolute versus relative quantum of that impact.

We are not talking about a big-ticket project that generated millions, but it is safe to say that I generated hundreds of thousands in three days of putting on free music. There is an economic argument and a logic to supporting the arts here. I keep explaining to everyone in this House that it is the small things added together that compound into sustainable economic growth models. You need people, but you also need regular activity and not necessarily chasing white elephant projects the whole time. That is my subtle dig at the fact that the arts pay off and it is worth us investing in the arts. I extend a courtesy to the Member for Gwoja who also makes a similar point on a recurrent basis, we both being the Parliamentary Friends of Live Music, as it were.

How is it that I can calculate such a generous sum? If you think about the cost of flights, accommodation, production costs, ticket sales, food and beverage costs, catering contracts and all the money those guys spent at the Mindil Beach and Parap markets, as well as all the secondary tourism tours, I had 25 people come here with their families for at least four days. Then there is the knock-on effect of everyone who was involved in that event. The return on investment is extremely high, and it is worth us considering what actually generates bang for buck in the Northern Territory economically.

Going back to the artsy side of it, the festival was a lot of fun; it was a delight to put on music and spread joy. It was great to see parliamentary colleagues being part of it. It was also heartening to see so many people invested in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and asking questions about what it did, what we could for it and what it could do for us.

We started small but mighty in 2025, and fingers crossed we will expand Fanfare over the next few years and hopefully involve a lot of local wind bands, brass bands, big bands and put on gigs through some of Fong Lim's hidden gem locations. I represent an electorate with a lot of cool places to make music that a lot of people do not know about. There is a lot of airport hangars, industrial warehouses, microbreweries, gin distilleries and seaside venues. There are pretty great schools as well, all of which had a small part to play in this year's festival and which I hope will have an even larger part to play in next year's festival.

I appreciate that it is a congested time of year, and it was a no slight on the Alice Springs Show; we organised this some nine months in advance and ended up clashing with the show. I make this commitment, though: if it is the case that we end up doing this on the same weekend this time next year, we will make sure we get to Alice Springs on tour because I know a lot of the people who were involved with the tour really love the Territory and were delighted to be a part of promoting the arts and music education in the Territory. I might add that some of them have longstanding connections to the Territory as people who lived or worked here in the past.

It was a fantastic opportunity to get an initiative off the ground, and I very much appreciate the support of everyone in the House for helping me to make it a successful event. Thank you very much.

I look forward to reporting back on the Fong Lim Fanfare Festival in 2026.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Madam Speaker, I will speak again about the escalating horror that Israel is perpetrating in Gaza. Israel continues to slaughter and starve the Palestinian people, and I speak on this today because we all have a moral obligation to speak against these blatant war crimes. We have an obligation to amplify our community's distress at the genocide. We have a duty to stand up and support in particular our Palestinian, Arab and Muslim communities in this time of unbearable pain.

We also have a duty to call out the federal government's sickening complicity with Israel's actions through our two-way arms trade and our support of the US military, which supports and finances Israel's actions. With weapons parts being sent directly from RAAF Base Tindal in Katherine to Tel Aviv, you cannot tell me that this is not relevant to us in the NT.

The past 21 months have been witness to a deliberate planned genocide carried out by Israel on the people of Gaza. For those who have been listening, Israel made its intentions clear. Amnesty International reviewed statements issued by the Israeli Government and military officials between 7 October 2023 and June 2024 that dehumanised Palestinians and called for or justified genocidal acts, and it found 22 separate statements made by senior officials that called for or justified genocidal acts, providing direct evidence of genocidal intent, which is important in humanitarian law.

As if those admissions, the horrific proof on our screens every day and the arrest warrants from the ICC for Netanyahu and his war Cabinet were not enough, leading genocide scholars across the world have confirmed this is a genocide. That includes two prominent Israeli human rights groups in the past two days that have come out and said, 'Our government is enacting a genocide in Gaza'.

This makes it hard for me and the millions of people in this country who are distraught and who have marched in protest, written letters and shared articles to understand how most of our political representatives stay silent. How can you do this during a livestreamed genocide? I still cannot believe there are people so cruel and so deadened to their humanity that they can simply ignore the suffering we are witnessing. When I listen to the deafening silence from most people in this Chamber, I am left to think, 'Surely, you must not be seeing the images and videos that we are'. I cannot believe that even the most heartless person in this room cannot be moved to action once they see the reality.

Madam Speaker, I seek leave to table some images and share some stories.

Leave granted.

K McNAMARA: This is only a drop in the ocean of the suffering and trauma, only a minuscule fraction of the sheer numbers of destroyed families and traumatised children. Honestly, I collected these images in five minutes. There is just so much more.

We have the paediatrician, Dr Alaa al-Najjar, who was in hospital, working with patients who were being brought in, when the ambulance brought in the nine charred and mutilated bodies of her children. Nine out of 10 of her children were killed in an Israeli strike as she was working at the hospital.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
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Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DEFAMATION

THURSDAY 31 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

How will victims of online defamation be protected? With a single publication rule, how will victims of defamation, particularly in digital spaces, seek redress when harmful material remains online for years?

Will digital platforms be held accountable? The Bill allows platforms to avoid liability if they act within seven days, but are mechanisms in place to ensure they comply? Will there be consequences for platforms that ignore or delay responses to legitimate defamation claims? Are there safeguards to prevent the misuse of absolute privilege?

Although protecting whistleblowers is crucial, are there protections against malice or false complaints to police? Will these changes impact small media organisations and independent journalists? The public interest defence is intended to support responsible journalism, but what guidelines will courts use to determine reasonable belief in public interest reporting?

During the scrutiny committee briefing on this policy, the need for clear public education was raised, particularly for Aboriginal Territorians and members of multicultural communities who may not be aware of these legal changes.

The legal landscape surrounding defamation law is complex. Even before these amendments, many Territorians were not fully aware of their rights and responsibilities under defamation law. With this Bill introducing new thresholds, new defences and new legal procedures, the government must ensure that all members of the community understand these changes. In particular, we must recognise that many Aboriginal Territorians speak English as a second, third, fourth or even fifth language. Many people in migrant and refugee communities may not be familiar with defamation law or legal terminology. Digital platforms are often the primary source of information in these communities, yet they are also the main arena where defamation issues arise.

The opposition calls on the government to commit to a public education strategy that ensures these reforms are communicated clearly, accessibly and culturally appropriately. This should include:

- multilingual resources explaining how the new defamation laws work, particularly in Aboriginal languages and key community languages such as Greek, Filipino, Mandarin and Vietnamese
- community engagement through local organisations, Legal Aid services and interpreters to ensure that those with limited English are not disadvantaged
- workshops or legal clinics in remote communities, where access to mainstream legal information is often limited
- clear, plain English guidance on how serious harm thresholds work and what steps individuals can take if they believe they have been defamed.

Defamation law should be accessible to all Territorians, not just those with legal expertise or strong English literacy. If the government is committed to ensuring fair access to justice, it must also be committed to ensuring that these laws are adequately understood by the communities most likely to be affected.

This Bill represents a much-needed update to our defamation laws. It brings the Northern Territory legislation in line with national standards, protects public interest reporting and recognises the reality of digital communication in today's world. We must ensure that these reforms do not unfairly disadvantage individuals, that digital platforms act responsibly and that access to justice remains fair for all.

The opposition will monitor how these laws are implemented and seek clarification from the government to ensure they function as intended. We support this Bill for now, but we urge the government to address the legitimate concerns we have raised.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to discuss this Bill, which has been on the Notice Paper for some time.

I am also pleased that the opposition has chosen to support the Bill, but provided some pointed remarks about it. It is true that these are long-overdue reforms. What is astonishing to me is that the opposition would raise this matter now and suggest that the reforms are overdue for any reason other than its inability to implement them. The stage 1 reforms were passed in 2020, and every state and Territory in the country bar WA has them in place. We are the only ones who have not done it, and it is because the former government never saw fit to make it a priority.

We are passing legislation at a rate of knots. Some of it is happening faster than people would like, but on issues like this, which are relatively uncontroversial and generally decided upon by both sides of parliament as a useful thing to do, we have not made any progress at all. We just had some niche critiques of what might be problematic about these defamation model provisions, so it is useful to zoom out and understand the bigger picture of what this is, what it will do and why it is a good thing. Perhaps that will lay the groundwork for how we might proceed with legislative reform in other important areas.

First up, for the uninitiated, defamation is a body of law that aims to protect individuals, groups and entities from the publication of false and damaging statements that can cause harm to reputation or standing in society. What does it take to do that? An action in defamation requires a number of things. First of all, it requires proof of statements that have been communicated by publishing to a third party, whether those things are written, spoken or electronic. It similarly requires that those statements identified will be about a plaintiff and also that they be actually defamatory and have caused or are likely to cause the plaintiff harm because of a negative claim about the plaintiff.

The Northern Territory has defamation law, of course. We have the *Defamation Act 2006* which is the Act that promotes uniform application of defamation in Australia. The objects of the Act that we have at the moment, aside from promoting uniformity, are to:

- ensure that the law of defamation does not place any unreasonable limits on freedom of expression and, in particular, on the publication and discussion of important matters of public interest and importance
- provide effective and fair remedies for persons whose reputations are harmed by the publication of defamatory matter
- promote speedy and non-litigious methods of resolving disputes about the publication of defamatory matter.

It is worth laying that as a foundation because from what we just heard you would think that defamation law was to be remade into something new, whereas in fact the existing *Defamation Act* seeks to ensure that the law does not place unreasonable limits on freedom of expression and fair remedies are provided. Non-litigious conflict resolution options are also built in.

Why are we doing this? Why is this a good thing? Why is it that the rest of the country already thought about this and got on with it a long time ago? It is because of the virtues of building upon model legislation to create uniformity. The idea is that model laws lead to model justice. In other parts of the country, stage 1 reforms were implemented long ago and stage 2 reforms have not been uniformly implemented. If we were to implement both by enacting this Bill then the Northern Territory will become the fourth jurisdiction to implement stage 1 and 2 of the defamation reform.

Let us go back a step. What is all this based on? It is the model defamation provisions. In November 2004 the model defamation provisions were discussed by the Standing Council of Attorneys-General. That is what led to our 2006 Act. More often than not when we do sensible things with law here it is not by being the vanguard and too bolshie; it is by seeing what is happening in other places—where perhaps there is more access to resources to fairly consider what might be done—and once we have the benefit of that wisdom, making things work in our local context. That is exactly what happened with our 2006 provisions. That, of course, does not exonerate the former government from failing to do anything with the stage 1 reforms for the last four years. However, I digress.

The Standing Council of Attorneys-General in 2018 met again to say, 'Perhaps we should review those model defamation provisions'. That led to a two-stage review process which has been alluded to—the stage 1 and stage 2 process. Stage 1 was led by New South Wales predominantly, and it was also involved in part A of stage 2. That was about the Model Defamation Amendment Provisions 2020. Victoria led the part B stage 2 reforms.

The overall benefit of this package is to eliminate forum shopping and to allows the law to better catch up to the challenges of the digital age with regard to social media in particular. This is the part where everybody in this House should pay attention because—for the most part we think, 'Defamation law is not my problem; it will not be an issue for me; I am not really paying attention; we have all agreed, so let us vote on it'—there was an important High Court case called *Voller* in 2021.

Voller is the law that we need to be apprised of in this place because it determines what can and cannot be defamatory in the context of the digital age. Different standards apply on Facebook from Instagram, your website or a Google search engine. What you do in your everyday political lives is up for challenge for

defamation and the rules and standards are incredibly different. If I have one takeaway piece of advice it would be that everybody has a look at the *Voller* High Court case.

Basically, one of the primary objectives of the stage 2 reforms is to limit the effect of the High Court of Australia decision in *Fairfax Media Publications Pty Ltd v Voller* [2021] 273 CLR 346, especially with respect to what the reforms describe as digital intermediaries. There is now effectively a new defence for digital intermediaries for online third-party content. In *Voller* third parties left allegedly defamatory content about Mr Voller on posts made on Facebook pages of three media organisations. The High Court found that these media companies could be sued for defamation as publishers of those third-party comments.

What is the benefit of the stage 2 reforms? Under the stage 2 reforms, a person or entity will be a digital intermediary if they provide or administer an online service—for example, a website or a social media platform—where a defamatory digital matter is published, provided they are not the author, originator or poster of the matter.

In response to *Voller*, the reforms create a new digital defence for digital intermediaries who will not be liable for an action in defamation if:

1. they can prove they have an accessible complaints mechanism—which is the defence that the Member for Gwoja should be interested in—to receive written complaints about defamatory content on their online platform, such as an email address or complaint submission webpage
2. assuming the written complaint is in a form that complies with the applicable legislation, they prove that they took reasonable steps to remove, block or disable or prevent access to any such matter within seven days of receiving the complaint.

This defence can still be defeated if the digital intermediary is motivated by malice in providing the online platform by which the defamatory matter came to be published ...

Mr Paech: No ministership for you.

Dr RAHMAN: I am sorry, Member for Gwoja, am I interrupting you? No? I was just double-checking.

Separately ...

Mr PAECH: A point of order, Madam Speaker! I think he is finished ...

Madam SPEAKER: Please take your seat, Member for Gwoja.

Mr PAECH: I am happy to put Standing Order 44.

Madam SPEAKER: Standing Order ...

Mr PAECH: I move that the question be put.

Madam SPEAKER: The motion is that the question be put.

Motion not agreed to.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, please continue. Let us pay him some respect.

Dr RAHMAN: I am a little sad about that. I cannot believe that a member would seek to gag debate on important legislative reform ...

Mr Paech: Yes, I know; that is why we are supporting the government. Get on with it.

Dr RAHMAN: I am sorry that it is boring you to have to do real legal work that you failed to do in your term as the Attorney-General.

Mr Paech: You will never be a minister. Get over it.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Gwoja, you are on a warning.

Dr RAHMAN: Separately, a digital intermediary providing caching, conduit or storage services will be exempt from the liability if they publish any defamatory matter in the course of providing those services. Now that exemption will not be available to a digital intermediary that participates in, encourages or promotes the publication of that defamatory matter, unless they are required to do so by law or a court or tribunal order.

These are important changes that bring us into line with the rest of the country. They put us in line with best practice. These are important things to consider, and it is laughable to think that they are not worthy of discussion here because it does not provide an opportunity for the opposition to grandstand.

There are exemptions also for search engine providers for search engine results, which is another thing that is important now, because the exemptions draw on the findings of the majority of the High Court in *Google LLC v Defferos* [2022], where Google was found not to be a publisher of defamatory news articles by reason of a search result, including a hyperlink to that article.

These changes are bringing us to the modern standard in the modern world. You want laws that reflect modern standards and best practice, so pay attention.

The expansion of the absolute privilege defence to defamatory reports matters published to police is also important, especially if you are concerned about people being able to make statements against the police. This reform is intended to provide greater comfort to persons making reports to police, which is important in that they will not be liable for defamation if they make a police report about someone. Practitioners advising clients will know that the subject of a police matter is a serious thing, and they should be mindful of this. This will afford people making the report with a complete defence to any potential defamation claim.

Defamation law frequently falls down in the service of notices. Under the stage 2 reforms, a notice can now be validly served electronically, which is important because you can send it by email, message and other electronic communication to make sure that a recipient has received it, for the purpose of giving or receiving documents on them.

The fact is that defamation laws are not uniform across the country. This is an opportunity for the Northern Territory to enact the stage 1 reforms, which it should have done long ago but failed to do because of the ineptitude of the former government. This is also a chance for us to get ahead of the curve by enacting the stage 2 reforms. We will be only the fourth jurisdiction in the country to catch up to the digital age, which is increasingly important for us to do.

I will not say terribly much more other than to note that the stage 1 reforms benefit us in a number of ways. They address the standard of serious harm, which should have been done long ago. They mandate concerns notices prior to proceedings, which should have been done long ago. They provide defences for public interest and peer-reviewed publications, which should have been done long ago. The stage 2 reform benefits will also include things like the new innocent dissemination defence.

I will not say anything more for fear of imposing on the opposition any further to have a substantive debate. What I will say is that the Attorney-General's second reading speech was comprehensive, as was the explanatory statement. This was one of the better explanatory statements that we have seen recently, as distinct from half of the ones from the previous government. I found typographical errors in them, because of the lazy process the former government ran.

The amendments will likely streamline core processes and will improve the legal test for damage to the plaintiff.

I support working cooperatively in this place and am frustrated by the fact that at the moment most of what we do in here is like playing chess with pigeons—it is ridiculous—people just defecating on the board and kicking the pieces over; act like a goddamn grown-up!

I support the move towards consistency and creating harmonisation of law with other jurisdictions.

I commend the Defamation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025 to the Assembly. I hope that you will all take seriously these important legal changes to improve our legal edifice.

Ms BOOTHBY (Attorney-General)(in reply): Madam Speaker, I thank all the members who contributed to this important debate on the Defamation Legislation Amendment Bill 2025, as part of our government's legal reform agenda.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

HON JOHN HOWARD AC

THURSDAY 31 JULY 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

fill our lives with hope and prosperity. Well done to President Rubina Bhardwaj and the committee members for the event.

I make special mention of the Super Mini Teej winner for 2025, Miral Sharma. Miral is only five years old, and she stole the hearts of everybody at the event. The Mini Teej winner 2025, Ajooni Challana, also did an exceptional job of representing her beautiful culture. As they said, crowned with absolute grace, was Ms Teej 2025 Sharanpreet Kaur Pannu. Congratulations. I have to say that watching those young women demonstrate the culture and the dance of their communities was truly wonderful. I was jealous because there was no way I would ever be that graceful, but there you go.

I will speak about something dear to my heart and recognise the recipients of my Larrakeyah Primary School citizenship awards. A big congratulations goes to Christos Hatzivalsamis for excelling in STEAM day and using the four Cs; Nameerah Jahan for consistently displaying the school values of respect, responsibility and achievement; and Digby Preece for outstanding problem-solving during the school's sleepover and in the classroom. I am not sure what the problems were that he solved in the sleepover, but I might need to find out.

I also recognise the recipients of my St Mary's Catholic Primary School citizenship awards: Eulalie Wenzel, for always demonstrating kindness by being a welcoming and inclusive friend, especially to new students joining the school; Vahaan Rakhra, for his care and consideration of members of the school community; Sunday McAloon, for showing care and compassion to her fellow students; and Chloe Munday, for her welcoming and kind attitude to her fellow students.

A big congratulations to a member of our Port Darwin community, young Joshua Harrington, who received the Chief Minister's Youth Volunteer of the Year Award. It is presented in celebration of an individual aged 14 to 27 years who has made an outstanding voluntary commitment and who, through their volunteering, has positively impacted on the lives of others. Joshua received this recognition for his exceptional volunteer leadership skills within St John NT, particularly as the Secretary of the St John NT Youth Round Table since its inception in early 2024.

I have previously acknowledged the amazing achievements of local boxer Stacey Barnes who represented the Northern Territory in a boxing tournament in Sydney earlier in the year. Stacey continues to excel in her boxing career. Following her win in Sydney she won her division at the Club Championships in Adelaide in May. She has reached super legend status as she goes from strength to strength in not only her boxing career but also her ongoing efforts as a cancer survivor to raise awareness of ovarian cancer.

Finally, I give a big shout-out to Julian Barry from Darwin Family Law, who is responsible for me getting on my pushbike for the first time in a very long time to undertake what, quite frankly, I thought might be the death of me—the 49-kilometre Sunbuild Gran Fondo Pollie Pedal. Julian sponsors this event, which is part of the larger Sunbuild Gran Fondo event, by generously donating \$500 to the charity of choice of any politician who manages to complete the event.

My chosen charity was Total Recreation, a fabulous charity that works to ensure people living with a disability get to enjoy activities like the Gran Fondo that most of us take for granted—so maybe not the Gran Fondo; I am not sure that the team members at Total Recreation would want to cycle for 49 kilometres. I could be wrong; they might want to do it. I will have to ask them. Julian, a big thank you for the \$500 donated to Total Recreation and your words of encouragement.

Thanks to my colleagues who encouraged me along the way: Hon Lia Finocchiaro; Hon Gerard Maley; Hon Josh Burgoyne; Hon Jinson Charls; Matt Kerle MLA and Khoda Patel MLA; as well as the members of the crossbench, Justine Davis MLA and Kat McNamara MLA, who gave me a bit of a hoo-ha as they whizzed past me on their way back the other way. I made it in the end, and I am pleased.

I think I committed to do it again next year; I am not sure, because I was too exhausted to recall the conversation at the end of that momentous event. No, I have not got on my bike since I put it back in the shed after the end of the race.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, last Saturday Rt Hon John Winston Howard AC turned 86. He was the 25th Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007. His 11-year tenure as PM was the second longest in Australian history. His birthday was noted by people across the political spectrum, and for good reason.

It is really only with the passage of time that people are starting to appreciate the totality of his contribution to Australian society, and that includes me. His Prime Ministership corresponded with my time as a student

at the University of Sydney. I was not particularly fond of him then, I must confess, while I was busy being a student politician.

Tonight I pay tribute to and reflect on his legacy, most unusually with a focus on his time in opposition and his early Prime Ministership. I do so because his leadership teaches us that enduring reforms come from establishing bipartisan consensus. The hard work that happens behind the scenes is what makes things stick. I have limited time to make these reflections, so I will confine my remarks to just two examples. I could have chosen from many.

The first is in relation to economic reform. Much is made of the Hawke–Keating government's economic reforms of the 1980s—the floating of the dollar, the dismantling of protectionist tariffs, compulsory superannuation and so forth. Less widely remembered is the role of John Howard as Treasurer in the period preceding that. Over the course of the 1980s the Liberal Party came to accept those free-market policies in spite of itself. John Howard's advocacy as Treasurer, against the wishes of then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, are what led to fundamentally decentralisation of wage fixation, financial deregulation, a broad-based indirect tax and the rejection of counter-cyclical fiscal policy. The modern Australian economy owes an enormous debt of gratitude to John Howard, as much as to Hawke and Keating for their willingness to cooperate with government behind the scenes. Arguably this was to his huge initial political detriment. That takes real political courage.

The second case study I draw on is in relation to public safety reform. Many people in this House will not have the memory of April 1996 when 35 people were killed by a gunman at Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania. It remains the worst mass shooting that was ever committed by one person in Australia's history. The massacre received significant media attention around the world at the time.

In the aftermath of it there was great focus on access to firearms. Less than two weeks after the Port Arthur shooting, the newly elected conservative Howard government had secured agreement for a nationwide bipartisan consensus on gun law reform. That reform would require all states and territories, which had responsibility under the Constitution for licensing and possession of firearms, to pass uniform legislation to restrict and control the sale and ownership of certain types of firearms. The Commonwealth similarly had responsibility for trade and would restrict the import of those firearms.

It is worth going back to the context of this because people forget the background. In 1987 there were killings in Melbourne and then Prime Minister Bob Hawke tried, through the National Committee on Violence, in 1988 to do something about this, but fundamentally conceded in 1991 on television that he did not have the constitutional power to pass the laws necessary to keep people safe. Paul Keating assumed the Prime Ministership in 1991. Whatever appetite there was for change was not seen through after the Hawke years. Another shooting in 1993 in Sydney resulted in the Safer Australia policy. Most commentators will fairly admit that also led to little substantive change.

In that political context it is remarkable to think that the conservative Coalition government, led by John Howard, which was elected in March 1996 and won a landslide victory, securing 94 of 148 seats in the House of Reps, ending 13 years of Labor government, chose then to stop Australia from replicating what John Howard regarded as American gun culture. In a prominent speech delivered in June 1995 he said:

Whilst making proper allowance for legitimate sporting and recreational activities and the proper needs of our rural community, every effort should be made to limit the carrying of guns in Australia.

John Howard was put to the test and called upon by the Coalition for Gun Control to show leadership, and he did. He was also urged on by the Liberal government in Tasmania at the time, which was a coalition Liberal–Greens government. Can you imagine that such a thing might exist in this day and age?

The Australian Parliament sat for the first time two days after the Port Arthur shooting. In his first speech to parliament as Prime Minister, John Howard moved a condolence motion and committed to pursuing gun reform for the betterment of Australia. His response was:

I will do all that I humanly can as leader of the government to bring about a significant improvement (to gun laws) and to address some of the great deficiencies that exist.

Those proposed reforms could not happen overnight, but for the fact that the Howard government was willing to work with people like Daryl Smeaton, the senior private secretary to several Labor ministers in the Hawke–Keating government, who knew how to tackle gun reform. Bipartisan cooperation is what resulted in those changes being made.

On 6 May, under the auspices of the Australasian Police Ministers Council, the federal Cabinet endorsed a draft policy for effective nationwide gun and firearms control. That included ruling, under that policy, all gun owners would require a licence; firearms would need to be registered; and gun owners would need a genuine reason for owning their firearms such as sport, farming or hunting—and a genuine reason did not include self-defence. Lots of people opposed that and did not want to pay a political price and so, as a consequence, did not want to be involved, but ultimately, Premier Bob Carr, Tasmanian Premier Tony Rundle and everybody fell into line in the national interest.

What is the legacy of these reforms? In the 15 years preceding gun reform, Australia saw 14 mass shootings in which a total of 117 people died. In the 20 years that followed, no mass public shootings occurred in Australia. In the years after Port Arthur, there was also a significant reduction in fatal shootings of fewer than five people, as well as a decline in suicide by firearm.

Implementation of the gun reforms enhanced John Howard's reputation and played a role in establishing him in the popular imagination as a strong and decisive leader with empathy and determination. It is prudent to mention that Rob Borbidge, who was the Queensland Premier at the time, paid the ultimate price in supporting the right thing to do. Howard said of Borbidge:

He never wavered. He was defeated at the next election and the strength of the One Nation vote in the 1998 Queensland election was the main reason why he lost. He paid the heaviest price of all and I've always acknowledged his courage.

Today is a significant anniversary for me. Two years ago I left the UK to return to Darwin to try, in my own small way, to make a contribution towards turning around the fortunes of the Northern Territory.

In March 2022 when I visited the Territory, I found the place topsy-turvy, with a lack of viable political opposition, an upside-down civil service with more generals than soldiers and oppressive economic conditions which were making it impossible for people to succeed and have opportunity in the Northern Territory. I am pleased to note that there are small signs of improvement across a range of metrics in the Northern Territory, but much remains to be done. Little will be achieved unless we can work together.

I was no great fan of John Howard when I was a university student. With the passage of time, I have come to understand that people like John Howard have done things that I looked over in the background. They laid the foundations for modern Australia in many ways. On their 86th birthdays, I would love to reflect equally on the contributions of other great political leaders across Australia who have set up our country by having respect for the game and our institutions and by protecting our parliaments and their conventions.

It is incumbent on all of us in this place to do the same so that we might also improve the prospects for Territorians and afford them all opportunity. We could all stand to learn from the example of John Howard, a great Liberal statesman and a great Australian leader.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I deliver a message from the Member for Drysdale. He says:

'Dear Chamber,

'Oh, how I've missed you this week. First and foremost, I've missed you, Madam Speaker. The void simply cannot be filled through a screen. I've watched where I could and pass on some notable mentions.

'To the Member for Arafura, your Bert and Ernie had me genuinely laughing. The Member for Blain and I will be squabbling over who's who, but I certainly enjoyed it.

'To the Member for Karama, fine form on your CLP award set-up. I look forward to hosting the Member for Gwoja as a special guest at our CLP AGM should the vote pass.

'Yes, my cinematic edit on Facebook seems to have caused a bit of turbulence. The Greens are losing altitude, Labor has opened fire and somehow, despite lying in my sick bed, I managed to earn a gentle rebuke from the Speaker. I hope even my political opponents can appreciate that kind of skill. Perhaps I am the most mischievous Ernie after all.

'To the Member for Johnston, if all is fair in love and war, just remember there is always more love than war in this heart for you, my friend.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

LCAC VAD SECOND INTERIM REPORT

TUESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

We got council to start focusing on its job, but there was still this question about whether the NT Government or council was supposed to do the work. This government is now working in collaboration with council and they are both working out the responsibilities of who should do it. This is a great thing.

Boulter Road was moved into the Sanderson electorate. I have to give full credit to the Member for Sanderson who has picked up on the same advocacy that I was doing. We all know the people. We have walked to see people like Linda Lay and all those who head up that residents' activist group. We are there all the time talking to them. It is only this government, along with the council, that is delivering anything because the previous Labor government neglected and ignored the residents. It does not matter what you say here, I was there. I have walked it. I have been with the people.

Let me say here and now—I hope the people from Boulter Road are listening to this—if you heard the speech by the Member for Daly, you have been ignored again. He wants to talk about everything else apart from Boulter Road. We listened to you about your petition. You went to the effort of coming to us and asking for something to happen. It is only this government, through the Member for Sanderson with support from me and the minister, who has got behind this and we are making improvements. A lot more has to be done.

We do not want to make the same mistakes that were done in the past. We need to get the strategies right. When subdivisions are done there is also a responsibility on the developers to make sure that they provide the necessary footpaths, street lighting and so on which have been missing.

I commend the petition.

Motion agreed to; petition noted.

PAPER TABLED

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee – Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory Second Interim Report

Dr RAHMAN (Chair of Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I table the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee report, Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory Second Interim Report, and associated minutes of proceedings.

Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) is a difficult, sensitive and challenging subject to discuss for many people, including Indigenous Australians. It was with some trepidation, therefore, that the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee embarked on a consultation tour across the Northern Territory in August 2025 to gather views, particularly in remote areas, on the possible introduction of VAD legislation in this jurisdiction.

I am pleased to report that over the last month our efforts to learn from and share information with Territorians have been undoubtedly fruitful and successful. Hundreds of witnesses took the time to express their views and provide detailed testimony. Oral evidence in tandem with the hundreds more written submissions we have received will help to inform our forthcoming final report which will substantively deal with the evaluation of VAD models with safeguards, challenges and potential delivery in the Northern Territory.

In the intervening period I am proud to present this second interim report on VAD in the Northern Territory to the Legislative Assembly and the public at large as testament to the excellent data collection undertaken by LCAC pursuant to the VAD inquiry terms of reference. In doing so, I express my sincere gratitude to my fellow committee members and the committee secretariat for their collegiality, cooperation and commitment to conducting this inquiry with rigour. Moreover, I thank the many hundreds of Territorians across dozens of locations who have contributed to this process to date. It has been a privilege to hear from all of them.

We trust that the report we have tabled will be of continued assistance to interested parties and we look forward to tendering subsequent work in due course.

I move that the report be noted.

Motion agreed to; report noted.

MATTER OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE Funding for Better and Fairer Schools Agreement

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I have received correspondence from the Member for Arnhem as follows:



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DARWIN FESTIVAL 2025

TUESDAY 2 SEPTEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

These successes highlight the incredible sporting spirit that thrives within Casuarina. Behind every award and selection are hours of training, dedication and the support of families, teachers, coaches and volunteers. I thank everyone who contributes to nurturing young talent and creating opportunities for our kids to succeed not just in sport, but in life. Casuarina is a community that celebrates its young people, and I look forward to seeing what these athletes achieve next. Congratulations to all of them.

I congratulate Casuarina Car Wash, which officially reopened under new ownership and management on 11 August 2025. The new operators are Gibba and Katrina Turnbull, along with their son Mathew and his partner, Danika. Gibba and his family are no strangers to hard work and determination. They have been successfully running family-owned businesses since 2001, starting from humble beginnings. Their first business was a labour hire company, and over the years they expanded into accommodation services in the mining industry, a tree-logging business and several other car washes.

Casuarina Car Wash has long been an important local service. Under the Turnbull family's leadership I know it will continue to thrive, and I wish Gibba, Katrina, Mathew and Danika every success as they embark on this exciting new chapter.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak about the Darwin Festival 2025. Sixty-four sellout shows, a record 50 venues, an extraordinary list of international guests and some of Australia's and the Territory's most dazzling performers and artists lit up the city between 7 and 24 August.

I was fortunate to represent Minister Boothby to recognise that last year's Darwin Festival won the gold award at the Qantas Australian Tourism Awards on 3 April at the Last Supper. I very much enjoyed having the opportunity to go to the program launch at the Deckchair Cinema on 3 June.

My involvement with this festival goes back a long way to when it was the Bougainvillea Festival in the 1980s. Growing up in this place, I have extremely fond memories of what it was. I remember what the Darwin Festival was when it started, and I know that it has now become world class. I say that with some authority because I have had the privilege of attending other great festivals around the world. I can say with great confidence that the Darwin Festival is truly magnificent.

I am surprised nobody is saying terribly much about the Darwin Festival tonight, given that it raised \$33m for our economy last year. For once, I am not here to talk about economics and the economic value of the festival. We should reflect on the pure artistry, the value of social cohesion and the goodness that it brings to our city, because it is important to remember the things that make Darwin and the Northern Territory a liveable, loveable and wonderful place.

One of my fondest memories as a Darwin Festival performer in years past was playing baritone saxophone in a Motown show between midnight and 3 am in the Spiegeltent, which used to be in the Darwin Botanic Gardens. I have seldom done more fun things in my life. I digress, so I will return to talking about this year's festival which had packed crowds.

The festival's closing weekend at the Darwin Ski Club featured the sold-out Anthony Callea and Tim Campbell 'The Songs of Elton & George' concert, the mesmerising Sarah Blasko and the final performance on the final night by the ultra-high energy Melbourne Ska Orchestra.

The festival is in its 46th year. The Darwin Festival saw this year, as it does every year, the introduction of something new—the Fort Hill Parklands venue opened, which was fantastic. On the opening weekend Guy Sebastian performed, which you could hear from Parliament House, as well as the New Zealand band L.A.B.

There were eight world premieres over the entire Darwin Festival period. The biggest-ever Taste of Darwin program had all its events sell out. Other sellout shows included Indian mentalist Suhani Shah; Emma Donovan; Merrick Watts, who does the hilarious An Idiot's Guide to Wine; comedians Melanie Bracewell, who a lot of us see on TV, and Dave Hughes; John Safran; Burnout Paradise and many more.

It was wonderful to see so many others out night after night enjoying themselves in our CBD, dancing, laughing or even just being in awe of people on the stage. If you have not been to Festival Park before, put it in your calendar to do next year because it is an amazing atmosphere. Everyone has a great time, listening to live music and eating amazing things. Whether you were at Festival Park, dancing at Club Awi or at a show, there was an amazing vibe.

All of Darwin is indebted to the people who organise the festival, believe in the festival and work their bums off for the festival. I am personally indebted to Artistic Director Kate Fell and CEO James Gough, who I met

when I was fortunate to represent the minister, and likewise Darwin Entertainment Centre CEO Georgia Hendy—it is now the AANT Centre—for inviting me to attend so many of the shows across August.

I would like to talk about many of the shows and there are many things I would like to point to, but I am limited for time so I will only speak about some of the shows I attended. To give you a sense of how broad, diverse and wonderful the festival was, flick through the program. You will see that an insane amount of stuff goes on in a short space of time, and there is something for everyone.

As many of you know, I am a musical person, so I tend to gravitate towards watching musical things, but the festival is a great opportunity to branch out and see stuff that is truly different, engaging and exciting in a different way. This year I decided to concentrate on the circus, theatre, ballet, opera and all the things that you do not get to see every day in Darwin. I will pick out a couple of my favourites.

La Ronde circus was at the Spiegeltent, which used to be in the Botanic Gardens but is now across from Parliament House. Inside that giant tent the things that people did and the feats of strength were astonishing. The show sold out night after night. I was going to take my dad with me, but I am pleased I did not take him. It would have been difficult to explain it to my father. There were a lot of pretty racy costumes—I will not lie—but it was absolutely delightful and so entertaining.

I took my dad along to Bangarra Dance Theatre's Illume program. I do not really understand anything about modern dance, but it is wonderful to see something I do not understand. The artistry and strength was beautiful. The Entertainment Centre was packed, and the performers received a standing ovation. Everyone loved it.

It is a privilege to see these things in person, and it is important that we had the opportunity to expose young people to all this. For the young, old, seasoned veteran, uninitiated—everybody—it is a beautiful opportunity. We talk about restoring the Territory lifestyle. I am a bad fisherman, but I love to fish and camp. It turns out I am a reasonable shot. However, the lifestyle is not just about hunting, fishing and camping; it is also about having the Darwin Festival and the arts.

The arts not only pay off amazingly economically, as I keep pointing out, but it is good for the soul. It is good for us to bond, sit in the park and eat Hanuman and ask, 'What is that quirky music?', and have a circus guy walk past juggling and god knows whatever else. It is a wonderful atmosphere and a magical place to be at this time of the year. I digress; I should talk about other shows.

I saw Suhani Shah, the mentalist, whom many of you have seen. Honestly, it was terrifying the things that she could do. Some of my colleagues are nodding. I was in fear that she would pick me out and pick my brains for all my deepest, darkest secrets. It is truly astonishing the kind of things that can be deduced. It is impressive. I do not know anything magic and I think it is not fair to even call it magic; it is more mentalism, as she puts it. She is a rock star across the Indian subcontinent. To see this woman do what she was doing on the stage was impressive.

I am a patron of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, as many of you know. The Heaven and Earth program was wonderful, especially the world premiere of *Wuyal's Journey*, which was something that you do not get to see every day. It was a long time in the making. Netanela Mizrahi and Banula Marika's work in cooperation was a special thing that they shared. It is worth everyone looking into it rather than have me explaining it poorly, but the bottom line is that it is a truly amazing cross-cultural celebration of Indigenous song with our Darwin Symphony Orchestra. It was something to celebrate. Everyone was extremely moved by the whole thing. It was a privilege to be there.

I saved the best for last. I saw a show called *Duck Pond*, which is basically the ballet *Swan Lake* done by circus performers. I cannot tell you how spellbinding it was. The feats of strength and the things people could do are such that you feel embarrassed just sitting in your chair and think, 'I can barely get up and down and this person is suspending their body weight on one finger off a rope'. It was mind blowing. If you ever get the opportunity to see Circa, please do so because they are amazing.

My time is drawing to a close, so I cannot say terribly much more today. I wish I could speak about the Darwin Fringe Festival, which I had the pleasure to launch, representing Minister Boothby, on 11 July. Hopefully I can talk about that on another occasion. The 10th Darwin Fringe Festival, which was launched this year on World Fringe Day, is a special opportunity for local performers.

I am already looking forward to the 47th Darwin Festival, which will again be curated by Kate Fell. It will be held between 6 and 23 August 2026 and will be preceded by the 11th Darwin Fringe Festival. I urge all of you

to get involved next year if you did not get to them this year and enjoy the wonderful festivals of August that we have in Darwin.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will speak on a number of matters. First of all, Gerry (Geraldine) Crowhurst from the Palmerston 50+ Tuesday Club recently had her 80th birthday. Gerry is a foundational part of the 50+ Tuesday Club. She is a rock who is always at everything unless she is literally in the hospital. I always appreciate getting my smiles and hugs from Gerry when I come to visit. Happy birthday, Gerry. I hope you had a great one. I am sorry I missed the party today, but I was here in parliament. Congratulations on your 80th, aka 21 with a few years' experience.

An amazing thing that happened recently in my electorate was the Book Week assembly at Rosebery Primary School. Congratulations to Principal Danielle Banicek and Assistant Principal Natasha Nichols. A lot of hard work was done by parents and teachers to get kids in their costumes and to have all the costumes made, ready and delivered to the school. The teachers especially put in a lot of time to make costumes for the performance and put makeup on the kids. Having three boys, I can appreciate how much work that is. They did it first thing on a Friday morning before assembly, which is even more impressive.

We started the assembly with a dance from the Year 3/4 and 5/6 students. Having boys and knowing how hard it is to get them to do anything you want them to do, it was incredibly impressive. It was a fantastic dance. After that, all the students marched up and down showing off their costumes. At assembly all the classes sit in rows with a gap down the centre, so class by class they all hopped up and marched so that their parents could see them. It was great.

I asked the principal afterwards why there was no judging and awards for best costume. She said that it was much better this way. Honestly, I would hate to judge best costume at that assembly because there were so many fantastic costumes from all the kids. We had about three Spidermen, we had a Minecraft costume and many costumes that I tried to work out what they were; I think I am starting to show my age. Unfortunately, the teachers were invisible. I could not see any of them because they had all dressed up as Where's Wally, so no-one could find them. Well done, Rosebery Primary School, on a fantastic Book Week assembly.

On Monday 1 September I had the honour of attending the NRL NT Frank Johnson and Gaynor Maggs Medal Awards with my colleague the Member for Fannie Bay. This is a fantastic night when NRL NT honours its standout players, coaches, officials and teams from the season.

As a proud supporter of the Palmerston Raiders and the Northern Sharks, I must admit that the Litchfield Bears are working hard and building their club, and the results are there for all to see in their rankings on the ladder and their results on the night. Well done to President Em Burkitt and Vice President Luke 'Hoody' Mahood of the Bears. I think the Members for Nelson and Goyder would agree with me on that.

Congratulations to the Northern Sharks for a strong showing on the night and being well represented in the awards. This is a credit to club President Gordon Hounslow, the committee and all the coaches, players and volunteers.

Some of the award winners on the night were:

- Frank Johnson Medal—Matt Woolmington, Litchfield Bears
- Gaynor Maggs Medal—which I had the privilege to present—Erin Luchetti, Litchfield Bears
- Rising Star—Murray Fogg, Litchfield Bears
- Gatley Shield Player of the Year—Trey Crowley, Nightcliff Dragons
- Under 18s Player of the Year—Murray Fogg, Litchfield Bears; and George Rosas, South Darwin Rabbitohs
- Coach of the Year—Thomas Gunn, Northern Sharks
- NT News Player of the Year—Trent Wedding, Litchfield Bears
- 'No More' Representative Player of the Year—Jacinda Summers, Darwin Brothers, one of our fantastic real estate agents, I believe
- John 'Shadow' Mount Club Champion—Litchfield Bears.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

CLIMATE CHANGE

WEDNESDAY 3 SEPTEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

different times of the year, and in some places in Central Australia, house reading temperatures were close to 50°C. That is huge.

It gets a bit hotter in Katherine than Darwin. We get about 44°C sometimes, and you walk outside of the beautiful air con and it is like being hit with a hair dryer in the face. It can be warm in October and November. It is one of the three or four hottest places in the Northern Territory at that time of the year. Katherine, Ngukurr, Jabiru, Rabbit Flat and sometimes Bulman have a similar temperature in that time of year. In December and January Alice Springs and the Central Desert communities take over and are hot throughout summer.

That material being used in construction, providing comfort and liveability and trying to mitigate the risks of climate change in places that are traditionally hot and getting hotter, is extremely important for sustainability in the Territory.

Ignoring this impending crisis is unacceptable. Scrapping any semblance of an emissions target is not the only backwards step taken by this government when it comes to managing climate impacts and setting up the Territory for a greener future; the CLP has also ripped up our 50% renewables by 2030 target, which was put in place to provide accountability and responsibility of government. The CLP has lied to Territorians about its reasons for doing so.

The CLP tried to claim that it was just too expensive and quoted a ludicrous figure in the billions. This is not true; it is nonsense and a further sign of a government that is not willing to take responsibility and do the hard work on such an important issue. Although the CLP government stopped short of denying climate science, it has no intention of doing anything to reduce the impacts of climate change for Territorians. That will be a disastrous legacy. It is blatant and wilful ignorance. There is no way of keeping with the views of the vast majority of Territorians if the government's members bury their heads in the sand.

Many of the points that the Member for Nightcliff's motion focused on were already in train under the former Labor government. You would think despite the change in government that the new government would still represent Territorians and that the idea of such an important issue like mitigating the impacts of climate change would be seen as a baton being handed from one team to another to continue that work. Unfortunately, that is not what the CLP government has done.

Significant work had been achieved. Much more is still to be done and should be underway, but, unfortunately, we will not see that with this CLP team at the helm. The stark contrast is that the CLP is taking us backwards when it comes to building a strong, resilient, prosperous, healthy future for the environment and our children. It is unacceptable. On behalf of Territorians, the Territory Labor opposition implores the CLP government to do the right thing, continue to work towards net zero emissions and make sure that the future of the Territory is safeguarded for many generations to come.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Mr Deputy Speaker, I will make a brief contribution on this matter. I do so, picking up on the sentiment of the Leader of the Opposition's statement about keeping the baton going rather than dropping the baton. I decided to make a brief impromptu contribution because I see great value in what everyone has said and more good and commonality in it than we might think there is. I see a good-faith effort by the minister to amend this motion to express a position that we can all get behind.

There were thoughtful contributions from everyone in this House, none more so than by the Member for Nightcliff who moved the motion. I extend my gratitude to the member for putting time and work in to explain their position on the climate science, well supported by academic literature and constituency views and not in a histrionic, melodramatic fashion but in a balanced, reasonable and considered parliamentary fashion.

I, likewise, saw the immediate, considered response from the government that asserts that we are not all climate deniers; we care about the climate and are committed, as the Leader of the Opposition alluded to, not to dropping the baton.

I will be clear to all my parliamentary colleagues: I implore everyone to think seriously, carefully and sincerely about voting on this amendment to the motion together because it signals to the Territory that we care, we believe in something common and—although we might disagree on the degree and speed of action that needs to be taken, the possible ramifications and the consequences in their fine-grain detail—we fundamentally do not disagree about the fact that this issue matters. We all should get behind it.

Rather than dropping the baton—or worse still, what we tend to do a lot around here, which is picking up the baton and trying to beat each other up with it—we should try to keep the baton going by passing it along

today. There is wisdom and much in common in what the mover of this motion and the minister in charge of this area said today. I ask you all to seriously give this consideration.

There have been more assertive and critical positions put forward by other members. There is a spectrum of concern when it comes to climate change. It is pretty clear that some people think that it spells imminent catastrophe and doom; others think that it may be a slow burn; and some worry that, in the race to try to solve problems for the long term, we will compromise prospects for current generations.

The challenge is trying to moderate a position and move forward in a measured way, because the reality of it is, as the mover noted, the horse has bolted to some extent; it has definitely bolted. I can speak to that with a limited amount of authority as somebody who was situated within the Oxford University Centre for the Environment for decades-plus and was surrounded by climate scientists, geophysicists, economic modellers and the people who were at the genesis of carbon capture and storage technology.

Carbon capture and storage technology is a good place to dig into this. The fact is that it is contested science. Some people think it is not much more successful than trying to trap wind in your pants, frankly. Other people will tell you that it has been successfully utilised to mitigate the effects of climate change if the geology and conditions are right and if you put in the work to build facilities. That is what the minister is pointing to.

In our government—which is carrying the baton from the last government to a large extent and the work done by the public service for all governments—carbon capture and storage is a commitment for our Department of Mining and Energy. Carbon capture and storage and innovation to try to make sure we do the right thing by people to mitigate climate change is still part of a shared commitment. It is extraordinarily important to recognise that fact. Let us not lose sight of that and that this side has unabashedly, unambiguously expressed that it is backing the Beetaloo Sub-basin and gas development. I freely declare that I am pro-sustainable resource development, whether it is mining or gas. For me, it is important that things add up economically. That is the baseline contingent for me.

Let us remember that the former government was also behind the direction we are going with the Beetaloo development, but slightly less clear and more ambiguous at times. We are simply carrying the baton and the torch in that regard. We are likewise carrying the baton to try to give carbon capture and storage technology the best possible chance it has to work in the Northern Territory.

Good points were made by the mover and the minister. There is so much in common here. I am trying hard to build a bridge. I am saying to all of you that this is a day for us to band together and do something good for future generations in the Northern Territory and not to let the baton drop. It is easier to say, 'You are not trying hard enough' or 'You are trying too hard and getting in the way of progress and development', but this is a real chance to agree on something constructive and productive. I say to the mover of the motion that if you think about the words expressed clearly by the minister, there is much more in common than you realise.

The original motion is detailed and provides specificity, which is a good thing; however, the thing with specificity is that it necessarily also becomes prescriptive. To be clear, I speak in support of my government, the minister and the amendment because I think that we should vote on this today. We should not throw the baby out with the bathwater, move to divisions and just indicate again that we cannot agree and move forward on anything; we should at least try to mutually acknowledge that we want the best for the Northern Territory, albeit the way we want to do it might vary ever so slightly.

Members of the Assembly, look at the minister's amendment. The first thing he says is that we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change. We live in a time of rampant climate denialism. We are living in a time when information is being picked and chosen on the extremes. We are starting to get to the point where we cannot agree on basic objective facts; we cannot find anything in common anymore. This is a bold, brave and genuine step by a minister to say, 'Yes, we have heard plenty to say that we are pro-sustainable resource development, but we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change'. I implore the opposition and the crossbenchers to think carefully about it; do not dismiss it.

Unlike amendments moved that unfortunately frustrate the intent of the motion, that is not what happened here. Yes, the amended motion will be a simplified version of the original motion, but the spirit and intent of it truly remains the same.

The first point is that we acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change. I acknowledge the scientific evidence on climate change, and the minister and government I belong to, in expressing this thought, is saying that it believes it as well.

Even more importantly, the second part is we recognise that, with a changing climate, the Northern Territory will be increasingly impacted by more extreme weather patterns. That is a sincere statement and a step forward. There are people in federal parliament who will not commit to that and are genuinely moving total denialism packages, running internal gymnastics that are politically insane, fractious and not bringing Australians together at all. That is a federal problem, not our problem.

We have a chance as parliamentarians of the Northern Territory to genuinely agree on something important, not with a division, and to say that a Greens member who believes in Greens things—which is what Greens do—has said that we should be seriously worried about the environment. Great; that is fine. It turns out that some of us are less worried about it, but we are still worried and do not deny it; we want to acknowledge it.

Recognising that climate change may have geographically disproportionate effects in the Northern Territory compared with down south is huge. I commend my learned colleague, the minister, for being brave enough to say that. Quite frankly, there are Environment ministers in a lot of other jurisdictions at the moment who do not have the guts, gumption, brains or balls to do exactly that; I think he deserves credit for that.

I did not intend to speak on this matter because I fully expected it not to be as collegiate as it has been so far. I implore us all, as a result, to take the time to think carefully about not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. This is an opportunity to say that we will not drop the baton—as the Leader of the Opposition intimated might happen—or take the baton and beat each other up with it, as we sometimes do. We will move it forward even if a little slower, an inch at a time, rather than getting on the good ship Greta Thunberg.

There is a way forward for us, and the more we can do cooperatively in this parliament, the better the chances are that we can move forward. I am not an Independent; I believe in the major party system and the fact that we have to, at the end of the day, agree to disagree sometimes. We also have to learn how to compromise. I want us to reach, as a parliament, the point when we can collectively compromise and agree that we are not all happy about everything, but we are happy enough with where we have landed on something that we can take it to the federal government together, put our foot down and say, ‘This is what the Northern Territory wants and needs’.

Leadership is not just the job of the person sitting second from the front; it is the job of everyone in this Chamber. Everyone in this Chamber has an opportunity to be a leader, be a statesperson and get behind our institutions and the government of the day. Just in the same way that convention dictates that public servants will execute the agenda of the day, we too carry forward a shared collective responsibility.

I draw on specific points that have been brought up. The motion is not self-congratulatory in the slightest. It is recognising the hard work of public servants and the NT Government, past and present, whose work is ongoing and deserving of our support. I had a tiny part in my stint working in the Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet, where I was part of the climate mitigation strategy consultation stuff. I went to maybe two or three day-long sessions, and other people had been doing it for months or years and continue to do that work. That is the work the minister pointed out today, which we should be supporting.

For the sake of our public servants, the people who are putting in the work and trying to make this happen, we should collectively be saying, ‘Okay, we are not entirely in agreement about the scale or the speed of the problem, but we are in agreement about the fact there is a problem and will work on it together’.

I will not speak to the mover’s original motion because it is not fruitful. Instead, I will speak on the minister’s words and re-emphasise important things he said, which I implore you all to consider in the back of your mind in the spirit of being collegiate, cooperative and parliamentarian-like.

I am not saying that you are not entitled to disagree; you may disagree on a matter of principle if you feel that is the best way forward. I chose to get up when I was not going to say anything about this simply because this is an opportunity for us to work together for the greater good for future generations.

Anthropogenic climate change is human-induced stuff. There is a range of actors in this country who will not even admit that part. The minister has been good enough to lead with that statement and say that we are referring to changes caused by humans. We acknowledged that they are caused by humans and, more importantly, that it is not a challenge that respects borders—that was his phrase.

We know we have a part to play, but we also have a sense of scale about how important our part is versus how important everybody else’s part is. The minister noted that Australia is committed to net zero emissions by 2050, and so is this government. He noted that, which is a bold and important statement for us to get behind. The government of the day has an agenda for the greater good. The perspective that we require is

exactly what the minister has provided. He pointed out that the reality is the Northern Territory contributes only 5% of total emissions and Australia less than 2%.

Member for Nightcliff, I do not want the perfect to be the enemy of the good. We want to work on this and will, maybe not at the speed and scale the Member for Nightcliff would like, but they had the good sense to bring this to the House. The member has done a kind thing in giving us all a copy of literature, which is in good faith. This is not the only thing that could be read in this area, but it is a great place to start, and for many people here it may be the first thing they have read about this; it may not. The point is that the member has, in good faith, brought something to the House. The minister has, in good faith, said that we do not want something quite as prescriptive and descriptive as this statement, but we, in principle, want to get behind this and band together on something.

I do not want to cherry-pick things from the Member for Mulka, but the bottom line is that he frequently asks us to work together. We can work together on these issues and carefully strike a balance between economic growth and climate responsibilities. That is what has been alluded to.

I hate to break it to you, but the economy is not resolved yet; there are small fledgling signs of positive movement, but look at the figures that came out today on state final demand. The fact is we will not get out of this tomorrow. We still need to develop, grow, build, attract beneficial investment and encourage innovation. We have sectors and projects in the pipeline that will contribute to emissions but are a part of that process, so we should be supporting those projects while thinking about mitigation and supporting what we have to work with by carefully balancing our economic growth and climate responsibilities.

We need to support emissions abatement technologies and renewable energy, which is exactly what the minister committed to. He said that we will support emissions abatement technology such as electrification, carbon capture and storage and the beneficial use of appraisal gas. That is a positive step in the right direction, as well as maintaining a commitment to renewable energy. We have a crazy amount of gas and sun; for the millionth time I reiterate that we will be well placed to do the best we can to utilise both.

As acknowledged today, our largest emitters have their own emission reductions targets. That has been asserted by the minister, as well as the fact that the NT Geological Survey, which has long done great impartial work in the Northern Territory Public Sector and still has great expertise, is working to identify suitable formations for carbon capture and storage. We have the EPA, which we still allow to independently go along with its work. We are looking to protect our natural ecosystems.

Our contribution to all this may be small, but it is still significant. It is important that we work together on this to support innovation. I do not think that multi-partisanship happens often here, but this is a chance for us to do that. Let us do something together for the greater good. Please do not let the perfect be the enemy of the good. I ask everyone in the House to seriously consider their responsibility to future generations and the present generation by signalling to the schoolkids who come in here every day that we can work together and support an amended motion that is sensible and carries forward the baton.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff)(in reply): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you to everyone who contributed to the debate. I acknowledge the Environment minister's amendment. Yes, unlike the previous amendment from the Attorney-General to my last motion, this amendment is on topic. I thank the minister for that. I appreciate that it retains recognition that the NT is increasingly impacted by more extreme weather events.

I hear you loud and clear, Member for Fong Lim, and I truly respect your desire for this Assembly to come together on something because it is something I also want. I respect that, and I guess I am torn. On one hand it does not matter what I do; the government has the numbers. Whenever I have a motion, if the government does not want it to go ahead, the motion does not go ahead. All the Member for Fong Lim's points are entirely accurate about the first two points being a big step, but the issue with the amendment for me is that there is no action, which is what my motion was about.

Dr Rahman: There is action already happening within the public service.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, do not interject.

Dr Rahman: It is my first one ever.

K McNAMARA: He does not interrupt often.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

DELIVERING FOR FONG LIM – YEAR 1

THURSDAY 4 SEPTEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

plant in order to protect our environment and to ensure all companies operating in the Northern Territory are accountable to our community and environment.

The letter is signed by the Member for Johnston. Is discussion supported? Discussion is not supported.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to talk about the year in review, which everyone had an opportunity to do in respect of the government's agenda. For my constituents of Fong Lim, I specifically wanted to draw attention to some of the things that I have worked hard, in partnership with others in this place, to deliver over the course of this year.

Nothing happens in this place without working with other people. I do not, for a second, lay claim to having achieved anything by myself without the help of others. It is the case that we represent individual constituencies, and it is extremely important that we let our members know what we have delivered for them across our wide and diverse electorates.

My electorate, as I have pointed out before, is made up of 12 remarkable locations which all require attention in different ways. It is not just about worrying about my boutique suburbs of Bayview and Stuart Park; it is also ensuring that I look after Charles Darwin National Park and people in The Narrows and Berrimah, fledgling new places. To my constituents across the electorate, I want to draw out a few things to give an indication of what I do when you do not see me like this in a suit, if you like, giving speeches in parliament.

Whilst I am on the topic of parliamentary contributions, it is important that members of the Assembly function as good local members, are out and about in the community and are good parliamentarians. That means making a proper contribution in the parliament. I am pleased to say that I have given close to 50 substantive speeches in the House in my first year, across a range of topics, and all those subjects and speeches I give are freely available on the digital office that my hardworking staff in my electorate and I have created. If you want to know what I have to say about the economy, police, housing, health or the arts, it is all there transparently for you to interrogate.

Beyond the innumerable events that we attend, representing ministers, parliamentary contributions and our community engagements, I will talk about a handful of specific things that I have managed to deliver for my electorate in my first year as the elected member.

Before doing so, I recognise a handful of ministers whom I have had the opportunity to work with closely to try to deliver specific outcomes. I also have had the opportunity to represent the Chief Minister on a number of occasions; the Minister for Trade, Business and Asian Relations in her multiple capacities in overseas engagement; the Minister for Arts on frequent occasions at festivals and artistic endeavours; and the Minister for Major Events. I am grateful to those ministers for the opportunity to fly the flag for the government and make a presence known at all these things. We are a team that shares the workload in that regard.

I have spoken about some of these things in small, but not exhaustive, detail. I have only a limited amount of time, so I will not go into forensic detail. One of my top 10 achievements for this year is the buses for Berrimah Northcrest. For five years children did not have buses to get from Berrimah Northcrest to any of the public schools in the northern suburbs, and now they do. I probably get more love, attention and fan mail from little kids regarding those buses than just about anything else. It warms my heart.

Security upgrades for Stuart Park Primary School—the minister for Education was good enough to help me on short notice to solve a problem which had been unsolved for a long time. Critical locks and doors had not been fixed as part of minor works upgrades. I got \$50,000 worth of that sorted at the beginning of this year.

Council affiliation for Berrimah Northcrest—for 10 long years we have been waiting, and people are paying lump sum rates, not getting their garbage collected, cannot chip and tag their dog and cannot go to the tip. I worked with the government to get a commitment in Question Time when the minister committed to resolving this issue by the end of the year. In the meantime, I have surveyed the electorate, collated the data and presented it to the minister. If and when our council ever figures out who is in charge—the various councils in the election are in some sort of limbo—I am confident that the minister will act decisively and swiftly, using the information I provided.

With the Fong Lim Fanfare Festival I delivered in one year a festival that actually moved gross state product. It did not make billions of dollars, but it made hundreds of thousands in three days. It contributed to the arts in a new way, and I look forward to continuing that commitment. I want to expand that next year, Member for Karama, to include other electorates so that we can support our fledgling community arts and band programs.

I have plans drawn up for the revitalisation of the Stuart Park high street and had modelling done for it. We are at the consultation and costing stage. The government has been good enough to hear me out to this point and believes in the integrity of the project. The government is looking at how we will revitalise the Stuart Park high street, because it will be good for all of us, I promise you. The return on investment will be high and it will reinvigorate Stuart Park and The Gardens in my neighbouring electorate of Fannie Bay. We can create a precinct, a gentrifiable area, which the Territory has failed to do in the CBD, because the CBD is choked of blood flow. We have to get that area free-flowing, and it will have a huge knock-on effect for everyone else.

In the background I have been working with the Minister for Health and the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population on brokering new workforce pipelines in healthcare. Watch this space, because more is coming soon. We know how critically we need healthcare workers in the Northern Territory, and you will all tire of me next year; that becoming my new theme, if you like. Watch this space, it is coming.

The Narrows, I have not forgotten you. I know people have been looking at that hole in the ground in Shiers Street for years, and I have a straight answer; it is not good enough. I will hold my government to account to make sure that there is more than a hole in the ground there. I will also put pressure on the federal government to work with us to build aged-care living in The Narrows. It is the perfect place to build a retirement precinct. The money is available federally to do it, and in partnership with the federal government, we can do that. It is something we could work on together. It is unacceptable that sitting in the middle of this prime location is unused land because we do not have a better plan to get the money or make sure the site is ready to go. I will be fighting that corner.

I have not forgotten about you in Woolner. I am working with the Waters Ward Councillors to make sure that we turn Brian Chong Wee Park into a park that is usable, not just a strip of land in the middle of a beautiful place with a tonne of kids but no toilets, running water or amenity. I will make sure that, as soon as the council figures out who is in charge, Brian Chong Wee Park becomes the next destination and one of the venues I use for upcoming festivals.

Bayview has not been finalised for all these years, and I will, in partnership with the minister for Lands and Planning, ensure we cauterise that wound and have no more question marks about whether there will be a stage 3 and where or when it will happen. We will ensure there is finality to that project so that everyone in Bayview knows what will be there and what it will be good for. There is a small strip of land where the developer has an entitlement to build. That has been the case for decades, and we will resolve that issue. My constituents in Bayview—I have been talking to them about it for a number of months—know that is coming to you soon, publicly.

I am proud of my electorate staff. I thank my loyal electorate officer, who hates the limelight, James Perrin. He helped me set up my office. I not only have a physical office; I am proud to have a digital office. I am goading all my colleagues in the House; you should all have a digital office. In this day and age, everybody should be able to access the services we provide online. Tanzilrahman.com is where all the constituents of Fong Lim can find everything I do. I am accountable to you; you know where I am and what I am trying to deliver for you.

I had the opportunity, through the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee, to attend the Scrutiny of Legislation Conference and to try to shepherd resolution of the voluntary assisted dying inquiry in partnership with my hardworking colleagues.

That is a little of what I have achieved in my first year, as well as being selected as a McKinnon Institute Advanced Political Leadership Scholar, and I am grateful for the opportunity.

I thank my constituents in Fong Lim for my first year. I look forward to working hard.

Mr O’GALLAGHER (Karama): Madam Speaker, I will highlight a couple of celebratory events I have participated in over the Dry Season.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

LCAC VAD FINAL REPORT TABLING
STATEMENT PART 1

TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

PAPERS TABLED

Legislative Scrutiny Committee Report on Inquiry into the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Legislation Amendment (Expansion of CDS and Other Matters) Bill 2025

Mrs CARLSON (Chair of Legislative Scrutiny Committee): Madam Speaker, I table the report from the Legislative Scrutiny Committee's Inquiry into the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Legislation Amendment (Expansion of CDS and Other Matters) Bill 2025 and associated minutes of proceedings. Pursuant to Standing Order 200(4), the report was sent to the Speaker and made public on 8 October 2025.

Amending the *Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Act 2011* and the Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Regulations 2011, the Bill seeks to reduce complexity and increase recycling across the Northern Territory by strengthening the Container Deposit Scheme (CDS) and making a number of administrative reforms.

The committee received four submissions to its inquiry. While all the submissions supported the government's aim to increase the effectiveness of the CDS, concerns were raised regarding the inclusion of plain milk containers and the associated transition timeframe. However, following its examination of the Bill, the committee is of the view that the Assembly should pass the Bill with no amendments.

As set out in the report, the committee also considered several matters that were raised in submissions or during the public briefing that were beyond the scope of the current Bill, including whether the refund amount for permitted containers should be increased. Pursuant to section 50(2) of the *Environment Protection (Beverage Containers and Plastic Bags) Act 2011*, the committee has subsequently recommended that the next review of the operation of the CDS incorporates consideration of the impact of increasing the refund amount.

On behalf of the committee I thank all who have made submissions to the inquiry. The committee also thanks the representatives of the Department of Lands, Planning and Environment for briefing the committee on the Bill. I thank my fellow committee members for their bipartisan commitment to the legislative review process.

I commend the report to the Assembly.

Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Report on the Inquiry into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory

Dr RAHMAN (Chair of Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee): Madam Speaker, this final report of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee represents the best efforts of the committee to address the terms of reference provided on 14 May 2025 to inquire into voluntary assisted dying (VAD). The VAD inquiry was challenging on enumerate fronts. It was challenging in terms of subject matter, scope and timeframe for delivery. It is a great credit to all involved that the work presented in this report is of significant quality.

It is seldom the case that reports such as this can capture and represent all perspectives and materials gathered and submitted. For that reason, we encourage interested parties to engage with the source materials of our inquiry in conjunction with this report—being the many hundreds of submissions and hundreds of hours of witness testimony—in order to understand the breadth of the data collected and the positions presented.

Notwithstanding the aforementioned, I am pleased to present this final report on VAD in the Northern Territory to the Legislative Assembly and to the public at large as testament to our collective commitment to progress resolution of VAD for Territorians. In doing so, I express my gratitude, first and foremost, to my fellow committee members across the aisle and within the government and, likewise, to the committee secretariat for its diligence and respective efforts towards completing this extremely challenging inquiry. I again thank the many hundreds of Territorians who contributed to this process and whose contributions will undoubtedly enrich our understanding of what is involved in finishing-up well.

Voluntary assisted dying (VAD) is an extraordinarily complex topic that evokes emotion and tension. It challenges us all. In discussing voluntary assisted dying, we are literally interrogating questions of life and death.

Ultimately, conversations about voluntary assisted dying are not just about fairness; they are also about competing rights and tensions within our system and society. They are about the tension between the rights

of individuals versus the rights of society, thinking about the common good and prioritising the needs of the one over the many. Sometimes lost in the debate is that these are also questions of a tension between equity and economy. Voluntary assisted dying is more than just an arbitrary concept; it is, in practice, something that requires support, structures, funding, rules, governance and compliance, all of which are essential parts of creating a framework to assist people with what we once referred to as euthanasia.

'Euthanasia' is a word derived from Greek terms; it speaks to the idea of a good death. Voluntary assisted dying—the modern nomenclature for euthanasia—is in some ways an imperfect expression of the idea, but it is the journey towards providing people with the option to have a good death and equitable access to voluntary assisted dying that has driven this inquiry.

It is important to recognise that this journey has been a long time in the making. It did not begin four months ago when this inquiry commenced but indeed, in the Northern Territory context, started some 30 years ago. One could argue reasonably that the pursuit of a good death is something that goes back even further than that.

In the modern context, as many Territorians who have been around for decades will know, the Northern Territory was the first jurisdiction in Australia and, indeed, internationally—depending on how it is defined—to legalise an assisted death on compassionate grounds for people who are terminally ill. The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act passed in 1995 when I was finishing high school. I can recall the fervour surrounding it at the time, and it is remarkable that the fervour has not dissipated. All these years later, there are still passionate advocates for the rights of the terminally ill in a legislative sense and in relation to the underlying subject matter.

The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act warrants mention as a precursor to discussing today's report because it provides the foundation for the discussions we are having. Some 30 years ago the then Chief Minister, Marshall Perron, took it upon himself to introduce a Bill to legalise voluntary euthanasia. He did so at considerable political cost, demonstrating great courage at the time. That Bill ultimately passed, as we know, by the slimmest of majorities and not across party lines but on a conscience vote.

The final vote was from then MLA Wes Lanhupuy who, in his final assessment, determined that whilst voluntary assisted dying—or euthanasia, as it was at the time—was not something he envisaged his constituency, representatives or the broader Aboriginal public would want to avail themselves of, it was not something he felt he should stand in the way of for the remainder of Territorians who were expressing, with some clarity, a desire to have legislation for voluntary assisted dying.

That Bill was substantively about voluntary assisted dying, but it also represented a point of maturity and growth for this parliament. It represented that this parliament had the capability and capacity to work across party lines for the greater good of Territorians. The Bill signalled to the Commonwealth Government that this was a jurisdiction emancipating itself; it achieved self-government in 1978, stabilised its polity and representative democracy and had the maturity to prosecute complex arguments and come to a determination of what was right for Territorians.

As history students all know, that legislation did not endure. The Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was challenged the year after it was enacted. Only four Territorians availed themselves of the opportunity to have an assisted death. In 1996 the Kevin Andrews Bill, as it is colloquially known, by a backbench member of the then Howard conservative government interceded to stop Territorians and subjects of any territory from being able to legislate in a number of spaces, most notably in relation to euthanasia. Territorians, by and large, were then—and continue to be—aggrieved by that decision of the federal government in usurping the will of Territorians. That was a step backwards in our constitutional journey and our capacity to determine our fate for ourselves in relation to all of our affairs.

Some 25 years or thereabouts passed before finally, in 2022, the Commonwealth Government amended that error and passed the Restoring Territory Rights Bill. That legislation was driven by members of the territories, including the ACT as well as our federal representatives from the Northern Territory. It provided the foundation for Territorians to once again determine their own futures in relation to voluntary assisted dying.

Many people assumed that there would be an immediate correction and that governments would seize the opportunity to act with haste to remedy what was an abrogation, in many people's eyes, of the rights of Territorians. That is not how things played out, as we are aware.

In the background, from the start of 2017 states of the Commonwealth had all started to make the determination that voluntary assisted dying laws should be considered and enacted as a matter of equity and

fair access to healthcare across all states. That process began in 2017 in Victoria where the first voluntary assisted dying legislation was passed. The passage of that Bill was a rollercoaster affair; it was achieved under herculean pressure. The efforts underpinning it were not to be underestimated, and the protagonists behind the Bill paved the way for every other part of Australia to gain access to voluntary assisted dying. It was Victoria first, followed by South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and most recently New South Wales and the ACT whose legislation, whilst enacted, has still not come into full effect.

Each one of these expressions of voluntary assisted dying legislation has developed iteratively, and each one of these Bills has learned from the last to the point where now Australia has broadly coalesced around the Australian model for voluntary assisted dying. From the outset of this inquiry, old hats to the Territory would put it to members of parliament of all stripes that we should simply resuscitate the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act, scrub out '1995', insert '2025' and Bob's your uncle. The truth of the matter is this is a much more complex matter now than at that time when there was a simpler regime for accessing an assisted death. For all intents and purposes the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act decriminalised the process of assisting with a death for a terminally ill person but lacked any of the checks and balances that are embedded in all subsequent legislation across Australia.

The process that Australia has settled on broadly for voluntary assisted dying is undoubtedly more burdensome and cumbersome than the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was; however, it is also much more rigorous and contains checks and balances in process and procedure to ensure we have something which provides Australians equitable access to voluntary assisted dying without ending up on a slippery slope argument to abrogating rights and devaluing human life.

In 2023 and 2024 the Northern Territory Government chose to finally act on the *Restoring Territory Rights Act* and commissioned a report of independent experts to inquire into voluntary assisted dying and how to progress the matter for the Northern Territory. That inquiry is the basis for the one the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee has undertaken. The 2024 independent expert advisory report contained 22 recommendations for how to progress the agenda for Territorians.

Our remit as a committee was in the first instance to interrogate the parameters of that report and to consider whether it was fit for purpose, could be refined or we could add value to the equation to ensure a possible practical legislative implementation of voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory.

By and large, we set out on our journey not with a view to challenge or to codify the 2024 report but to simply add a body of knowledge to the 2024 report's findings, particularly with respect to the views of Indigenous Territorians and Territorians who live in remote and regional areas. The challenge had been made that, in the past, consultations outside of major urban centres had been limited and that there was an opportunity for greater consultation to be done in areas outside of major cities.

The terms of reference for the inquiry were, therefore, fivefold: first, to provide a consultation paper to stoke the conversation again. With respect to the consultation paper, we provided a 50-page document for Territorians where we simplified the issues and broadly considered the main questions of access, eligibility and process. We did the best we could to distribute that information to Territorians across languages in multiple mediums and forms to provide people the opportunity to be grounded in the major issues surrounding voluntary assisted dying.

The second part of our terms of reference was perhaps the most important and value adding: the direction to consult extensively with people in remote areas of the Northern Territory to gauge views from people who may not have had the opportunity to fully provide views.

The third part was to evaluate existing VAD models across the country and, to some extent, the world to establish where we are up to and where we might go from here.

The fourth part of the terms of reference was to consider specific challenges for the Northern Territory, noting that we have unique geography, demography and economy to consider. As we are all aware, one size does not fit all, and the Northern Territory is measurably different than the rest of the states and territories of Australia.

Finally and uniquely, we were charged with the responsibility, if appropriate and if suitable support was found for voluntary assisted dying, to provide drafting instructions for model legislation. That final direction is extremely unusual by the measure of parliamentary inquiries. It is rare to be afforded the opportunity by the government of the day to prescribe what model legislation in a space might look like. The government is to be credited, in my opinion, for providing us the option not to simply make recommendations or provide

testimony and evidence but to say, 'This is what the VAD law should look like in the Northern Territory if we are seeking best practice and to make it work for Territorians'.

That final part of the process alone is many months of work. The totality of the terms of reference that we were provided was, in my opinion, a huge ask of any parliamentary inquiry, let alone within four months. I emphasise that point to reiterate that it is a great credit to all the people involved in this inquiry—the committee secretariat and government, opposition and crossbench committee members—that we could provide anything and submit a report of any quality, let alone of significant quality.

The protagonists involved in the inquiry had to work collectively and coherently, albeit in a highly pressurised, challenging space discussing extremely sensitive matters under impossible time constraints. Nevertheless, we produced a document which we believe will progress the VAD agenda for Territorians in a meaningful way beyond simply paying lip-service or, honestly, playing politics with the issue, which I reiterate—with no pun intended—is actually a matter of life and death.

My priority as the Chair of this committee has always been to oversee a process that has been rigorous and transparent but not necessarily to advocate for an outcome one way or the other. I am not interested in dying on a hill for the issue of VAD; I am interested in demonstrating that this parliament can take something challenging, as our predecessors did in 1995, and deal with it with maturity across party lines for the greater good of Territorians. By and large, we have done that.

What does rigour and transparency look like in the context of this inquiry? In the first instance rigour and transparency looks like keeping Territorians abreast of what we are doing. We were provided terms of reference mid parliamentary sitting on 14 May, and the committee wasted no time in meeting immediately to clear our calendars for four months and try to establish a timetable for how to deliver this process. That included doing things that are not often done in this parliament, which we did not to grandstand but to keep Territorians apprised of our work.

Interim reports were presented to allow Territorians to know that we were working on this continuously. The first interim report submitted in this parliament in July sittings outlined work that had been completed to date and the blueprint for the inquiry going forward to give people confidence in the process that we were seeking to follow.

Similarly, the second interim report tabled at the start of September, at the conclusion of all our hearings and consultations, outlined in detail exactly where we had been, who we had spoken to and the parameters of our consultation, including the details of specialist advisers whom we had procured to help guide our deliberations, noting that none of us are subject matter experts in this area.

Those interim reports were part of the process, as was regular engagement with media and providing media releases to allow Territorians to know where this journey started, where it is up to and where it goes next. That should be, in our opinion as a committee, the gold standard for how committee inquiries are conducted, particularly when they are substantive inquiries with heavyweight subject matter, as is the issue of voluntary assisted dying.

We also prioritised at every stage the full and timely disclosure of submissions and evidence. We have iteratively released for public viewing all of the 400-plus written submissions that we received, whether they were manifestos and thesis length or simply two lines of somebody wanting to have their say. All that evidence is important.

As I pointed out, the reality is that all of that evidence can never be captured in its fullness in a report of 200 to 300 pages, but it is important to recognise that everyone who had a say counts. I say to everyone who provided a written submission to this committee: we heard, read and considered your submission. The fact is that we were asking the opinions of Territorians not for a tick-box exercise but because we are genuinely interested in what Territorians have to say on this matter.

Some of it is extremely intelligent; some of it is slightly bonkers, but all of it is important. That is why my fellow committee members and I took the time to wade through the materials—to say nothing of the committee secretariat which, similarly, has been drowning in VAD-related materials for months—and have surfaced with a report.

The other thing we did to give our process rigour was not exclude the prior voices that established the parameters for the VAD agenda. To that point, from the outset, the committee took a number of private briefings with key protagonists. The former Chairs of the 2024 independent expert advisory panel were at the

top of our list. We are extremely grateful to the former Administrator, Her Honour the Honourable Vicki O'Halloran, and Duncan McConnel SC for taking the time to help guide our journey and cooperate with us at every turn to avail themselves and support our process without, at any stage, detracting from our efforts.

Other key people provided significant private briefings to us in the background, including key advocacy groups for voluntary assisted dying. We took those meetings deliberately because we wanted to hear from everyone we could reasonably hear from within a time-limited period. We heard from Go Gentle, the Voluntary Euthanasia Society and advocates. At subsequent junctures we also heard from key opponents of voluntary assisted dying to ensure that we did not silence the voices of Territorians.

To that point, the committee worked through all the submissions we received carefully to determine what should be available to the public, redacted or kept confidential. In the main, the committee has sought to provide transparency, provided that people's interests would not be personally affected—of course, redacting people's names and addresses, so on and so forth, in submissions. For the most part, we allowed people to have their say. Whether what they have to say is rational or reasonable is for everyone to judge for themselves. We wanted people to be heard and to ensure we provide transparency in this process so far as reasonably possible.

As I alluded to earlier, we also took the opportunity to appoint key subject matter experts as advisers. The first of those advisers was a medical and clinical subject matter expert. To Dr Geetanjali Lamba, on behalf of the committee, I express my gratitude for helping us as people without medical or clinical insight to work through challenging questions that only a subject matter expert could guide us with. It is a credit to her that she could do so dispassionately, notwithstanding that she herself was a member of the 2024 independent expert advisory panel and has a personal view of these matters. Her input was key in helping us to understand the finer details of what is involved in voluntary assisted dying in practice.

The other core group of advisers who we appointed and who have provided, in my opinion, immeasurable value to this process—and differentiate the work that we have done here from prior work—is the legal advisory team from Queensland University of Technology.

QUT's team was headed up by Professor Ben White. Anybody who knows anything about voluntary assisted dying in a research or academic sense will know that Professor White is the Australian gold standard academic on these issues. Professor White was ably assisted by Dr Madeleine Archer, Katherine Waller, Dr Katrine Del Villar and Denisha Tyler. That group of people from the Australian Centre for Health Law Research provided us with the practical legal guidance we required to turn the committee's policy positions and deliberations into quantifiable, executable legal drafting instructions.

The drafting instructions for model voluntary assisted dying legislation are appended to the final report in Appendix 3. To a large extent they have attracted a lot of the attention because they are, in essence, the distillation of a blueprint for how to go forward. It was important for the sake of legislators, parliamentary drafting counsel and our legal department within government that we could provide succinct and clear guidance on what we believe, as a cross-party committee, is the best way forward.

Having said that, they are not the totality of the story. Today, in the main, I will not focus on the drafting instructions but on many of the other materials supporting that, including the report itself, the recommendations and the underpinning data.

My focus today in sum is to provide clarity for Territorians and parliamentarians on why the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee (LCAC) has made the choices that it has; the 'what' of what we have done; and the underpinning logic of why. In isolation, simply reading the drafting instructions—detailed and as well produced as they are—does not necessarily provide the totality of the picture of how VAD could or should work in the Northern Territory.

Without being impolitic or impertinent about it, in the time since the report has been delivered, the sequence of questions that I and my fellow committee members have received from many people—the general public, our own colleagues, bureaucrats, advocates and lobbyists—all demonstrate to a large extent considerable misunderstanding of many of the issues surrounding voluntary assisted dying in practice.

We are looking to talk about things in a practical sense and explain the choices we have made for the benefit of everyone involved with a view to progressing the agenda, because here is the nub of the issue: in-principle support for VAD is one thing. Do you support VAD? Yes or no? That is a much less complex question to ask but a fairly imperfect one that does not progress the agenda for us meaningfully in isolation.

Without consideration for broader factors, practical and timely implementation and how we will achieve that, if we are not careful with what we do there is risk of endorsing, supporting or providing a legislative solution for voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory that prohibits Territorians from realistically accessing it anytime soon.

We have tried to make the tough choices on the curly questions. Today I will explain why we made the choices we have. That broader consideration required is, first and foremost, signposted and signalled within the table of contents, if you like, for the report. I go straight to the contents. There is a sense for what the priorities and issues are. It is not just about eligibility and whether somebody should be over or under 18; there is a broad landscape and ecosystem of intersecting issues.

For that reason, our report begins with background to the inquiry and an explanation of the conduct of the inquiry which, to some extent, I have highlighted today. Then it progresses immediately to considering the intersection of VAD with existing NT healthcare, because VAD does not operate in isolation; it is another component of healthcare that has interdependencies and interactions with, most notably, palliative care, aged care, primary healthcare, interpreters and telehealth. There is a range of interdependencies. To think about VAD simply in isolation does a disservice to the whole agenda.

We have tried, within a confined space, to consider challenges to healthcare delivery in the Northern Territory to situate the VAD conversation. We have considered remoteness and cross-cultural challenges, noting that 30% of the Northern Territory is Indigenous and we are the most culturally and linguistically diverse population in the country. We are ethically, religiously and racially more diverse per capita than anywhere else. We simply cannot ignore those factors when thinking about healthcare or burden of disease. Burden of disease plays into understanding of VAD.

As many have heard me speak about in this Chamber, in relation to other matters, we discussed at some length health workforce shortages. The fact is we have a shortage of healthcare workers, whether doctors, nurses, allied healthcare practitioners, patient care assistants, translators, liaison officers or Aboriginal healthcare workers. We have a strained system with a finite number of staff. We do not have standalone service delivery in a range of areas or a specialist standalone paediatric or cardiology setup.

It is important to recognise that this is a new component to the healthcare system and if we want to introduce it, it has to work alongside what we have and not come at the cost of it. Therefore, we consider the interface with existing health services: aged-care services; mental healthcare services; disability services; and Aboriginal medicine, belief and practices, noting our unique demography.

That is a lot of content to cover in 20 pages in one chapter, but it is indicative of the scale of what we were tasked with. Again, our report, in the main, is geared towards providing practical instruction for how to move a legislative agenda for VAD forward. To do so in isolation would be negligent and, in the committee's considered opinion, deleterious.

We move on from thinking about intersection of VAD with the existing healthcare system to the phrase that we landed on that resonated most profoundly for Territorians across the width and breadth of the Territory, 'finishing-up well'. We found time and again that there was resistance and baggage associated with the word 'euthanasia', which is a dated word for some people—beloved by some, but hated by others.

We found all manner of resistance to words, the nomenclature, VAD or voluntary assisted dying. Some people simply did not like the terminology and felt that it detracted from the compassionate and decent side of what providing a good death was all about. When we talked to people, particularly in our remote consultations across the Northern Territory, about providing people with help and choice to finish up well, people nodded their heads in profound agreement.

The fact is we are, for all of our differences, human, and no-one anywhere wants to die a bad, painful, lonely or isolated death embedded in suffering. To that extent we considered what it means to finish up well and what medical treatment and pain relief provides in this space, including palliative care, palliation and palliative sedation. We considered a natural death and the testimony we have received from many places about people who stoically want to die unaided by assistance, even with great suffering. Pertinently for this inquiry we considered finishing-up on country, which was of profound importance to huge numbers of Indigenous people wanting to connect to place and have the opportunity, provision and support not to die in a hospital bed in an urban centre, miles from the place you are connected to culturally, spiritually and practically. Finishing-up on country, as a result, had to be mentioned with care and detail in our report.

End-of-life choices vary, and we had to explore, to some extent, palliative care and the idea of withdrawal from treatment because the brutal reality of it is that not every community in the Northern Territory is New York City. There are profound capacity deficits, service deficits and workforce shortages across the Northern Territory, and it is simply not possible to provide the full suite of services and opportunities in many places. I return to the fact that, by and large, people do not want to die a painful death; for the most part, they would prefer to be surrounded by loved ones in a place where they feel that they would wish to pass on.

It is an unreasonable expectation for most to be asked to withdraw from treatment and finish up on country, unaided with assistance and any of the tools of modern medicine to help you with pain relief and to pass on in a peaceful manner. We had to wrestle with these challenging questions and sensitive matters. The committee members represented all sides of the political spectrum, and we all have personal beliefs. We all carry, to some extent, political baggage and had to work together for the greater good. It has been challenging but a testament to the entire group that we found consensus positions in the main.

Nowhere is that truer than in relation to our fourth chapter: service delivery models. In some ways the signature piece of the 2024 independent expert advisory panel report was recommendation 2, which suggested that the Northern Territory should have a fully centralised VAD service delivery model. In practice, we are talking about, in the interests of providing clarity about where the lines of healthcare end and VAD starts—in the interests of prioritising cultural safety and not confusing people interacting with the healthcare system—a fully standalone separate VAD service.

When you dig into the nuts and bolts of what that involves, we are not talking about one doctor and one nurse on standby. There is an architecture surrounding the provision of VAD—the VAD navigator service, centralised pharmacy services, reviews board and governance and so forth, all of which I will come to in due course. A key deviation for this committee was to, on balance, decide that the best way forward for the Northern Territory in terms of providing equitable but also realistic and fast or at least timely access to VAD was to instead lean on what is broadly considered a community-based model—what is in fact utilised everywhere else in the country to a large extent.

I will provide just a small amount of definition to that before I speak about it at length later. The Northern Territory has some 1,400 doctors, give or take. We have, per capita, more doctors than anywhere else in the country, something like a metric of 5.2 versus 4-point-something for the rest of the states and territories. But we know because of our unique demography, geography and burden of disease that is still not enough doctors to manage our specific healthcare challenges.

The idea that introducing a couple more to stand separately from all that would manage this process for a finite number of people who might avail themselves of the service, at a considerable cost, is unrealistic and not a pragmatic outcome in our view. On the basis of that, we have advocated to deviate from the 2024 report in suggesting that we should be utilising the full network and tapestry of our service providers, including private healthcare practitioners who provide primary healthcare, some two-thirds of the time.

In essence, we want to basically make use of our existing structures and existing network of healthcare providers to allow people embedded within the healthcare system already, who choose to participate with voluntary assisted dying, the opportunity to do so.

We subsequently moved on in our report to purposes and principles which are often glossed over and not articulated clearly. What is the purpose of this report and the underlying legislation? What are the principles that underpin why we are doing this? I will come to that in detail shortly.

From that point onwards, the report becomes technical, substantive and gets into the guts of some of the things that we turn our minds to usually when we think about VAD straight off the bat—eligibility requirements broken down into voluntariness, medical conditions, residency, age and capacity; the request and assessment process that is followed for VAD—the flow diagram, if you like, of what happens, what happens next and what happens after that, then how many days you have to do this and where you get the drugs from—all of that business.

We will go through the assessment process in regard to formal requests and the use of interpreters and telehealth. The administration of the VAD substance is not an insignificant issue, which is the focus of our eighth chapter. Let me be clear: this is the kind of thing that will not be in the report, but that issue almost single-handedly derailed the Victorian effort to enact VAD legislation.

At the eleventh hour there were questions about safe storage and supply—where it will be, who will have the lock and key and how it will operate? These are the nuts-and-bolts questions when considering legislation

for, implementation of and realistic and timely access for Territorians to VAD. There is then, of course, the question of what happens after a person dies. There are questions to be resolved, including the notification of death, interactions with the Coroner and so on and so forth.

We consider health practitioners' qualifications and training and, for the most part, land in the same place as the 2024 report and standards around the rest of Australia, noting however that we simply do not have a ton of doctors nor nurses and so relying on structures that are important and leaned upon heavily in other parts of the country—for example, like nurse practitioners—is less of a priority for us than it is for other places. Put simply, our position was to land on doctors making decisions and then to extend that to doctors and nurses having the opportunity to help with the administration of VAD if and when required, particularly on location.

There is also the issue of self-administration, which has a number of curly questions attached to it which we will go through shortly. A critical deviation for this committee regarding past work is in relation to non-participation by healthcare workers and entities. Our committee has broadly been of the view that choice is paramount in discussions about VAD—the choice to access VAD as a patient and the choice to conscientiously object if you do not want to be involved in the process as a healthcare worker. That is not to say that we want to frustrate the process, but in the contest of completing rights we should be prioritising choice at all times—the choice of an individual not to be involved with the process on whatever grounds they see fit and the choice for institutions to determine that VAD, if legislated for, is not something that people will be forced or compelled to deal with. We are trying to provide help and choice for people to finish up well and for people to participate in assisting people with voluntary assisted dying if they so choose, but also the protections in laws to withdraw from the process if they choose not to participate.

Accountability offences and protections are the kind of thing that you do not think about on the front end, but creating VAD legislation necessarily means that you have to think about all manner of other legal structures and intersections with the legal system. The review board is again a point of departure from many other states and Territories. We have landed on a consensus position where we have suggested that we should make use of our existing resources, tools, structures and mechanisms. Across the country the number of people who have availed themselves of voluntary assisted dying is not in the thousands; it is in the hundreds, and that is in states and territories with populations of millions. If you reasonably extrapolate to the best of your ability from that dataset, all our evidence suggests that we would expect reasonably no more than 10 to 20 people a year to avail themselves of VAD in the Northern Territory.

Ten to 20 people does not in our minds—in the first instance as a matter of expediency, time and equity—justify setting up huge and expensive separate structures, and that is part of the reason why we have suggested that our review board, unlike any other review board, should be chaired ex officio by default by the Chief Health Officer of the Northern Territory, embedded within the Northern Territory Department of Health, not a totally standalone separate statutory entity that will require time and significant resources to be set up and be supported in perpetuity. We recognise that means there is complete and perfect separation from the health system or from direction from the government of the day or the minister, but on the balance of all available possibilities we think that it is a constructive way forward.

I note also—to foreshadow that I will come back to it—that these are matters we interrogated extensively with the Department of Health in our discussions with them in public hearings on 5 August and 5 September. I thank witnesses from the Department of Health who spoke to us at length and were extremely honest and clear cut with us about the practical, pragmatic reality of VAD, what it would take in relation to implementation, what the true cost would be and what would be required to not set up the health system to fail on poor delivery of voluntary assisted dying.

I can remember them off the top of my head. I am grateful for Chris Hosking, the CEO of the department; Dr Paul Burgess, the Chief Health Officer; Dr Kane Vellar, a clinical subject matter expert in palliative care; Dr Jeremy Chin, the Chief Medical Officer; as well as Dr John Zorbas, the head of the Australian Medical Association. Those five individuals took considerable time to report to us in person and in writing to help us understand what was possible in practice. As a matter of equity, they all felt that people should have access to voluntary assisted dying in some form. That is essentially the position that this committee has landed on as well. However, as a matter of practice, we had to dig into what it would cost, how we would do it, what the best way forward is and how we can make best use of what we have.

Returning to chapter 12—Accountability, offences and protections—we had to consider the composition of the review board carefully. I will go through that shortly.

There must be appeal in law—rights, procedures and options for people to take VAD outside of the medical process and the healthcare system. The natural fit for that in our jurisdiction is NTCAT, the NT Civil and

Administrative Tribunal. We know how overstretched the NTCAT is. We understand adding a workload to it on complex matters that may not be entirely within its subject matter expertise adds an extra layer of challenge. However, we deem it to be the appropriate forum to make the subjective determinations when there are appeals processes. What if somebody does not quite meet eligibility or residency requirements? What if there are problems in the formal assessment process or reviewing documents, testimony or witnesses? None of which preclude the fact that all rights under law should still exist in terms of appeals with the Supreme Court.

Creating this kind of legislation also necessarily requires us to create new offences and contravention provisions because if the processes of VAD are misused or abused, it is necessary for there to be measures in law for remediation and justice, as it were.

Finally, there are a number of miscellaneous provisions which we had to address, including one that would not necessarily turn to mind, which is the public education component of all of this. Little is known or understood about voluntary assisted dying in practice by a great number of protagonists. It is important that, whatever happens with his matter moving forward, the government of the day continues to maintain clarity of communication with all Territorians. Many of our witness transcripts will validate that we had iterative discussions with Territorians about VAD, much more so than just saying, 'What do you think about X?' To some extent the question would then come, 'I do not know anything about X; I have not heard much about it. Tell me about it.' It will be extremely important for us to take into consideration public education, implementation and the package of materials that will be required to progress VAD meaningfully.

I turn my attention to the fundamental goal of this report, which has always been to progress the issue for Territorians, not to be determinative in any specifically prescribed way in one direction or another. The focus has always been largely on the drafting instructions—the blueprint and the recipe for how to bake the cake. Drafting instructions are a distillation of the inquiry; they do not represent the totality of the inquiry or the report. On the contrary, the report has a significant number of separate and specific recommendations detailed.

I turn my mind to the report recommendations with a view to elucidate the broader issues. Embedded within the report are 80-odd recommendations. My remarks will not focus on those that are self-explanatory. A number of recommendations are self-explanatory and do not require contextualisation; however, a great number of them require more clarity. It is not my intention to read out the report, submissions and data—as much as I would like to do so—but rather to provide context and establish the underlying logic and highlight the interdependencies between a number of these recommendations which are the next level up from the drafting instructions in terms of explaining the 'what' but not necessarily the 'why' of how we proceeded,

With respect, I say to the Assembly that Territorians have been waiting many decades to talk about this issue, for progress and to be heard. Without belabouring points, I will take my time to explain to Territorians how we think we should move VAD forward.

The report has many recommendations, some of which marry up closely with the drafting instructions but some that are separate to the drafting instructions, are a level above the drafting instructions and are important to making sure that VAD in practice will work in the Northern Territory.

Recommendation 1 seems harmless enough: we recommend that the government drafts legislation as per our drafting instructions to progress the agenda on VAD. We are saying to all of you that we have comprehensively looked at these issues as a committee of five, across parties. We have delivered a report for the first time in living memory for some that has no dissenting report. We have a unified position on what we think will work, challenging as it was to figure it out.

The report is comprehensive, as are the drafting instructions. More importantly they are context specific; they are not cookie cutter, taking a Bill from another jurisdiction, mucking around with it a bit and seeing if it will work. We are talking about creating bespoke legislation that is consistent with VAD legislation across the rest of the country and the Australian VAD model but that is unique to the Territory, recognising our unique burden of disease, demography, geography, limitations, capacity deficits, workforce shortages, fiscal position—all of the above.

Our starting gambit is to say that this committee determined that there should be draft legislation to move this agenda forward. Why do we make that determination in the first instance? Because we believe that there is more than 51% and less than 100% support for VAD. We cannot measure that, nor were we tasked with doing that. It was not the job of this committee to run a referendum on VAD to say 'X% of people are for; X% of people are against.' That will now become the job of all parties involved with VAD going forward to

determine within individual communities and constituencies the extent to which there is support for voluntary assisted dying of a specific type and model, pertaining to a specific Bill.

I encourage—I believe I speak on behalf of the committee—all parliamentarians to be canvassing opinion on voluntary assisted dying, not just in principle but with some reference to practice. In the absence of a better framework to articulate that practice, an excellent starting proposition would be Appendix 3, the drafting instructions for model voluntary assisted dying legislation in the Northern Territory. Seek opinion not just on whether people are a ‘yay’ or a ‘nay’ but if they are on board with what is embedded here.

The second recommendation of the report at face value might look glib or like a bit of a nonsense throwaway but it is not; it is a carefully considered thing that we have said, which is that we recommend that the government names any forthcoming legislation the ‘rights of the terminally ill’. We have said that not just to pay homage to Marshall Perron or people who have come before us on this issue but because we think that the history and legacy of this issue should be recognised and embedded in our thinking for voluntary assisted dying moving forward.

The fact is that in other places the nomenclature ‘voluntary assisted dying’ rather than ‘euthanasia’ or ‘terminally ill’ has taken over to provide for the possible expansion or development of voluntary assisted deaths. But in Australia, there is real clarity regarding the fact that voluntary assisted dying should be available not to people with dementia, who lack decision-making capacity or who are exclusively suffering from mental illness, but to people who are—for want of a better word—terminally ill.

There is specific nomenclature for that, which is in the legal term ‘having an advanced and progressive condition’. We will come to that shortly. We think it is significant and important to take back to the public that we are looking not to resuscitate the 1995 Act but to pay respect to it and recognise that, in the Northern Territory, Territorians should have access to finishing-up well through their implied and expressed right as a terminally-ill person to avail themselves of a good death. I encourage whoever goes forward with this process to consider the importance of maintaining the focus on terminally ill persons and their implied to right to a good death.

Our third recommendation is an extremely significant and substantive one which is not mirrored in the drafting instructions at all because it does not, in truth, necessarily have a place in any forthcoming legislation. It is a recommendation that government reviews current palliative care services and develops a palliative care strategy that is broader than what it has now, recognising the mountain of evidence we have that shows that there is an increased need for palliative care services following the introduction of VAD.

If you look carefully at the testimony from 5 August and 5 September with the Health department, you will see the clearest expression of that from our healthcare practitioners saying, ‘We know we already have significant limitations in palliative care’. We are stretched on all those fronts, and there are many places that cannot avail themselves of palliative care properly. To introduce this, we know, will place additional strain, so you will find robust questioning from me of those parties to work out just how much more we need, how much more it will cost and what the real workforce impost is of introducing voluntary assisted dying.

Again, I thank the witnesses for their clear and honest testimony. The fact is, estimates range between 10% and 30% of additional impost. That level of extra effort in the healthcare system in palliative care is not something that will happen readily or easily at a time when we are constrained fiscally, but it is a necessary thing to turn your mind to. To give it some context, we know full well that in other states that have implemented VAD legislation, one of the common refrains of mistakes we made and the things we should have thought of beforehand when we were going through the VAD process was the extent to which they should have had both discussions concurrently about VAD and palliative care.

Victoria probably has the best evidence of just how slammed they have been in palliative care since the introduction of voluntary assisted dying legislation. The same could be said of every jurisdiction across the country, so it is extremely important that as we develop this we also turn our minds to equitable access to palliative care and appropriate resourcing of those services in a place that has significant capacity deficits and healthcare challenges.

Recommendation 4 is the recommendation we have made explicitly and clearly that VAD in the Northern Territory should be provided via a decentralised service delivery model, consistent with the VAD Australian model. This is about not letting the perfect be the enemy of the good. If we were flush with cash, population and a healthcare workforce, I would be the first one to say in the interests of maintaining complete confidence in the healthcare system for everybody and separation from aged care, palliative care and primary healthcare

that we should have completely standalone division of VAD, build a building for it, put the standalone workforce in it and make that the place where all these discussions can be had, but that is just not realistic.

To be clear, that is not specifically, entirely or necessarily what the 2024 report has suggested; they simply made a clear statement that a centralised model would be ideal—and their preference—without necessarily specifying what components should be centralised and decentralised. Our thinking, as expressed in the report to some extent but more obvious through the hours of testimony, witness hearings and lines of questioning we pursued, is that certain core components of VAD must be centralised, like the pharmacy service and the VAD navigator service. Certain parts must be funded to succeed and maintain suitable separation even with Chinese walls—as the expression goes within a law firm—in regard to the review board.

There are other components of the voluntary assisted dying process that should be decentralised. We should be making use of our network of primary healthcare providers not just in the public system but in the private system. That means, for practical purposes, the many private GPs we have across the Northern Territory can opt in and become accredited providers of VAD services if they so choose.

We are not suggesting that there should not be, in the interest of equity, a state-based service provision of VAD. Where that is, how that happens and exactly how that is most equitably achieved it is too much straight out of the gate to put that entire burden on the Health department. It is important that you can at some point access VAD services through the state-based health system, but we believe it is equally important and does not compromise unduly the integrity of the VAD system to utilise our existing mechanisms and focus on a decentralised service delivery model.

Essentially, we made decisions not as bean counters, not because we do not care about equity and not because we think that people who are Indigenous, out bush or on a cattle station should not be able to access VAD; we absolutely do. We know statistically speaking that the majority of our, let us call them 200-odd cases a year, can probably avail themselves of systems and services in urban centres, initially, and as we have seen elsewhere these things develop iteratively over time. There has been some change in VAD legislation, although I add to that point that individual states have found it hard once they do something to them re-open the can of worms and then prosecute a better VAD system. What has tended to happen is that one state has gotten this in place and then the next state has had a better think about it, learned a few lessons, improved upon a few things and tweaked things and so on and so forth, but it is all still within a tolerance of sameness of the Australian model for VAD at this point. Decentralised service delivery is a part of that.

Recommendation 5 is about the purposes of VAD, and they are quite often not articulated expressly. It is important that they are, because the purpose of VAD legislation is in the first instance to provide a lawful, authorised and safeguarded process for voluntary euthanasia and for good deaths. Our recommendation is about making sure people have a legally authorised option to hasten their death, that we establish a lawful process, that we provide legal protections for healthcare practitioners who are in the system, that we ensure that there are safeguards and that we ensure there is a review board to oversee the process.

I seek leave to table a paper titled, 'A right to die? Euthanasia and the law in Australia' by Bartels and Otlowski.

Leave granted.

Dr RAHMAN: I, as many of you know, am partial to quoting the data, science, literature and evidence. There is a mountain of things that I would like to bring to the table but that I will not introduce to the debate at this stage. This one piece of literature, I think, is extremely useful for everyone in the House to flick through, and it is because it is not recent; it is from 2010, and as far back as 2010 it provides a clear expression of the fact that people have been trying to get voluntary assisted dying legislation up and failing. This pre-dates any of the Australian setups providing voluntary assisted dying legislation. It also documents the Territory's journey and the Commonwealth's intervention to nix that journey to provide voluntary euthanasia.

One of the key points that it makes, which often people who are outside of healthcare practice are shocked by, is the following, which I will read directly from the article, under the heading, 'Ineffectiveness of the criminal law prohibition and risk that the law is brought into disrepute'. This is under the section in this paper regarding the euthanasia debate and arguments for providing a legislative framework for VAD. I will read two sentences:

Another key argument in support of legislation is that the criminal prohibition is ineffective in practice in preventing the occurrence of euthanasia. Over the years there has been incontrovertible survey evidence that active voluntary euthanasia is being performed in Australia, with approximately one-third of the respondent doctors reporting that they had at some stage provided such assistance.

Then there is a footnote with reference to another 10 pieces of literature, just in the Australian context, including 'Doctors' practices and attitudes regarding voluntary euthanasia' from 1998; 'Voluntary euthanasia and the logical slippery slope argument' from 2002; 'Euthanasia: attitudes and practices of medical practitioners' from 1994; 'A third of surgeons in New South Wales admit to euthanasia' from 2001; 'End-of-life decisions in medical practice: a survey of doctors in Victoria' from 2007; as well as the book from Magnusson, *Angels of Death*, exploring the euthanasia underground by Melbourne University Press in 2002.

I table this document for the benefit of everyone in the House so that we can apprise ourselves of the fact that our legislation, if it is to exist, must exist for a purpose. That primary purpose is to provide a legally authorised framework for euthanasia or voluntary assisted dying—a lawful process with legal protections and safeguards, without which these practices occur and are known to have occurred. There is empirical evidence to suggest so across all cultures, peoples and countries of the world.

Recommendation 6 of the report is about the principles that underpin voluntary assisted dying. The purpose is one thing; the principles are another. The principles that are embedded will not be to everyone's liking and reflect the nomenclature of human rights Acts, to a large extent. As all of you in this House will know, the Northern Territory does not have a human rights Act. However, the principles as reflected here are done so because they are the same principles mirrored in other Australian VAD legislation.

I argued that I believe harmonisation and consistency with legislative frameworks around the country is always our best possible position to maintain, wherever possible. This recommendation takes that idea and puts it in practice by saying that every human life is of fundamental importance; people's autonomy is extremely important; end-of-life choices should be respected; people should be provided high-quality care and treatment; registered health practitioners should be able to conscientiously object and be shown respect for their culture, beliefs, values and personal characteristics; and within the Northern Territory context especially, people have the right to cultural safety in relation to VAD. It is a recommendation that I believe belongs in our legislation in some form—recognition thereof—irrespective of whether we have other protocols governing human rights.

Recommendation 7 is about destigmatisation for some people, which essentially says that when people die via a VAD process, taking that substance does not mean they died by suicide but by the disease, illness or medical condition that allowed them to be eligible for VAD in the first instance. That is important not just because of destigmatisation but because of practical considerations and effects that interact with things like insurance, liability and death certificates. It is important that we provide the protections required for people who interact with the system. This is another one of those.

Recommendation 8 is about voluntariness and acting without coercion. Voluntariness in this whole process is paramount to our committee. There are two parts to the recommendation, which in some way seems contradictory but is not because we understand where the balance of where our rights and responsibilities are. We essentially say that people must be acting voluntarily and without coercion but, likewise, in our context, a person may voluntarily request family members or other culturally important decision-makers to be involved in making VAD decisions in accordance with culturally accepted practices of decision-making.

Those two things are not in conflict; they are in tension, and that tension is resolved in our drafting instructions at 3.13 where we make it clear that in the formal request processes for voluntary assisted dying that it is the decision of the individual person who is accessing voluntary assisted dying. That is paramount. It is that person who must make a choice voluntarily and without coercion, albeit we recognise that they may do so within an ecosystem of friends, family, community, church and culture. All manner of other agents may influence the decision, but the decision remains with the individual in law as prescribed in this report.

Recommendation 9 will have attracted attention because it is the determination that we have made on the vexed issue of prognosis. In Victoria when this first got up it was a real challenge and a close-fought thing to get voluntary assisted dying legislation passed at all. In many ways, whilst Victoria was first, it is the hardest and most cumbersome jurisdiction to access voluntary assisted dying in. You can google 'VAD reform', 'suicides', 'not working', 'reform required' or any combination of those words and will find a lot of press, as recently as a couple of weeks ago, suggesting that the Victorian system requires reform to catch up to other jurisdictions so that people can access VAD without being frustrated from the processes.

There are a couple of critical things that hold things back. The first one is the issue of prognosis and timeline to death. Every Australian state has some combination of saying, in simple terms, that you must be dying in 12 months or less. In some places it is six months for certain classes of conditions, but there is a timeline at prognosis to death. The ACT, which is the most recent jurisdiction to pass voluntary assisted dying legislation, dispensed with that requirement. After much deliberation, our committee agreed that we should concur with

the ACT position. We did so for a number of reasons. The first, most important, is that we spent four months looking at this in an extremely congested, manic, high-pressure inquiry. The ACT had a much longer time horizon and did an exhaustive amount of work on the issue of prognosis, and their conclusion was ultimately that 12 and six months were arbitrary and difficult to determine metrics to use in eligibility.

We have not done anything vanguard. We are not ahead of the rest of the country; we are simply keeping pace with the iterative development of voluntary assisted dying legislation across the country. We decided, as a group, that people must have an advanced and progressive condition which is expected to cause death but that there is no requirement to specify whether that death will take place within six or 12 months irrespective of the condition. It is not a single standalone provision, though; the medical condition must be causing intolerable and enduring suffering that cannot be relieved in a manner that the person feels is acceptable.

We have allowed for the inclusion of anticipatory suffering, which is one of the curly question issues of development in VAD legislation. We have recommended that suffering can also be caused by anticipation or expectation based on medical advice of future treatment or the progression of the medical condition.

I will not speak about slippery slope arguments and the range of other weak arguments that oppose VAD; there are some good arguments in opposition to VAD. I simply do not believe, and I do not think anyone on our committees believes, the slippery slope arguments of, 'This is the thin end of the wedge. If we do this everything will fall apart; the healthcare system integrity will fall apart and people will be knocking each other off left, right and centre.' There are rigorous controls in the Australian model for VAD. Is it more cumbersome than the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was? Absolutely. But there are better checks and balances to ensure that only people who are eligible can access the mechanisms.

The thin-end-of-the-wedge arguments do not carry water with us, and that is why we think anticipatory suffering is a fair thing to include within advanced and progressive condition and intolerable and enduring suffering. The issue in lay terms for us was, 'What is the price of entry into the club versus what is the price of drinks once you are inside?' We have set this up so that Territorians should not be prohibited, if they are suffering and terminally ill, from accessing the beginnings of the VAD process.

From that process onwards, we maintain a high watermark for ensuring that the people who make determinations on eligibility, legal rigour, witnesses and document—those standards are maintained at a high level, and we have made no compromises in respect of any of that. In simple terms, there is no cover charge to come in, but drinks are expensive, as opposed to other systems where there is a small cover charge but drinks are cheaper. This is distinct from some versions of this overseas where basically you get in for free, and drinks are on the house. We think we have the right balance to make this pragmatic and equitable.

Recommendation 10 is the first of the recommendations in regard to eligibility on residency. Again, I am here to allay concerns about any histrionics regarding VAD tourism. Nobody will come here first. It will take a while to get this set up. There are other places where this is already working and where people can avail themselves of these things sooner. That is why we have maintained the standard of two years' residency in Australia and, ordinarily, 12 months residency in the Northern Territory.

What does that mean for somebody who is ill now and wants to use VAD services in the foreseeable future? I will not be dishonest about it; the probability is you could not access a VAD service in practice for at a minimum 18 months and closer to, at best—I would say, as a non-betting man—a couple of years. Why is that? It is because even once we have a Bill and it passes, which may take months, there is a standardised 18-month implementation window that has been adopted across Australia so that health departments, service providers and the public can wrap their heads around what needs to be done and how to do it properly.

I have nothing but sympathy for people who are suffering in the Territory and are in an advanced stage with a progressive condition that will cause them death. The reality is that it has taken time to get to this point, and it is worth us getting it right to make sure that if and when VAD legislation comes to the House, it is the right legislation, it is suitable for Territorians and people can meaningfully, practically and consistently access these services without compromise to the greater community and polity.

It is important to note that recommendation 10 has a built-in exception, which we recognised as extremely important, to make sure people who have a strong family connection, cultural connection or support linkages through the Territory—such as people who might have been here once upon a time and left—might be able to avail VAD services in this place. Without wanting to be cheeky about it, the straw man that we use for this argument on all occasions was Marshall Perron. What if Marshall Perron, who was the Chief Minister and the architect of the initial legislation and who has a long and deep-seated connection to the Northern Territory

but has resided interstate for some years now, wanted to come back to use voluntary assisted dying services in the Northern Territory? Would we account for or allow for that?

We are allowing for the process for people to apply to the review board at least for exceptions and exemptions. We think that allows sufficient flexibility to make sure people do not forum shop in our forum, but also so that somebody who is connected to a cattle station, lived here once upon a time or wants to be back at their ancestral place or place of significance can be here for a voluntary assisted death.

Recommendation 11 is completely uncontroversial. I say that because it is unbelievable how many questions I have had from people such as, 'What will the age limit be on VAD?' In our exhaustive 30 meetings and deliberations traipsing across the Territory we spent no more than 30 seconds on because it is a no-brainer for us that only people aged 18 or over can access this. That is not to diminish the argument that there are young people under 18 who suffer and fall into the category of people who may have an advanced or progressive condition, may be intolerably suffering and may have the reasonable expectation of anticipatory suffering. The Australian standard at the moment, which we have sought to keep pace with without getting ahead of, does not provision for minors to access voluntary assisted dying in any form. We maintain consistency with that position.

Recommendation 12 is about decision-making capacity. It goes to the complex question that arises time and again about people who have dementia. Our same line in the sand exists with the issue of people who suffer from dementia as it does with minors. At the moment, no Australian jurisdiction provisions for people who do not have full decision-making capacity to avail themselves of VAD services.

We recognise that a person's capacity may fluctuate from time to time, but that is a person with capacity to make decisions in the first instance who, perhaps because of illness, is now fading in and out of full capacity as they progress through the stages of the VAD process. We have made clear that all persons must have full decision-making capacity in relation to VAD at all stages of the VAD process. We will discuss the stages of the VAD process shortly.

Australia is simply not yet there with allowing people who have dementia alone to be decided for by other people. That may change in time. I have no personal position about it beyond the fact that, as a lover of the law, I believe in the harmonisation and consistency of our legislative frameworks. This is consistency with the legislative position across the remainder of the country.

Recommendation 13 again makes clear the situation with regard to mental illness. Mental illness is commonplace, ubiquitous and almost inevitably interacts with people who are dying. However, it is not, in and of itself, enough to be the sole basis by which to access VAD. A person can have a mental illness and an incurable condition and be eligible for VAD but cannot, on the basis of mental illness and malaise alone, access voluntary assisted dying.

This is one of those differentiating lines between the Australian VAD model and notably some situations in parts of Europe where people who are suffering have been deemed to be eligible for voluntary assisted dying services even when they do not have a terminal illness. We maintain the position that people must have an advanced and progressive condition, and mental illness and disability cannot be the sole basis for a decision regarding voluntary assisted dying.

Recommendation 14 is where we begin to consider the initiation of conversations by medical practitioners. This is an extremely important topic where other jurisdictions have essentially tangled themselves in knots by being overly restrictive in not allowing people to have conversations. As far as our committee is concerned, we believe people should be able to access information unrestricted but that choice should always be protected. In practice we are talking about allowing medical practitioners to initiate conversations about VAD, provided that they also canvass all other treatment options and the nature, scope and availability of palliative care services. Likewise, with the next class of people down, the healthcare workers may initiate the conversations where they have in fact been prohibited expressly from doing so in a number of other states.

We found evidence of the same in our own inquiries, with ex-Victorian nurses who were now embedded within our healthcare system who asked the question, 'Will I be able to talk to people in my facility or under my care about this? I was around when they introduced this in Victoria, and it was a nightmare when we were expressly prohibited from having the conversations, referring someone or having the conversation on a specific premises.' We have tried to work through those issues to ensure that there should be no restriction on healthcare workers being able to provide information on a topic. To that point, we have also clearly defined who constitutes a healthcare worker as well as people who provide health services or personal care services,

meaning registered health practitioners as well as another person who provides health or personal care services.

The next segment of recommendations pertains to the process of VAD. The process of VAD will be seen by many who are not familiar with the Australian model to be cumbersome, much too complicated and frustrating, but it is the Australian standard. It is essentially a four-stage process of a first request, a second request, written formal request for the process and then administration. It is broken down into much more fine grain detail and steps than that, and I encourage everyone to become familiar with the flow diagrams that are embedded within the drafting instructions to understand it better—I am struggling to find the page now, but in any case, people can find the diagrams for themselves in relation to the process followed.

Recommendation 15 is the first place where we consider that the individual is still paramount, that a first request must be an explicit request for assistance to die and that requests can be made only to a medical practitioner. They can make that by themselves and not by somebody on their behalf, and it must be clear and unambiguous.

Recommendation 16 is about the medical practitioner being able to choose to accept or refuse that request. Again, this is where we have embedded that people can conscientiously object because they either conscientiously object to be involved or they are otherwise unwilling, but even when they do we have made sure that those medical practitioners are still compelled to provide patients with referral information and access to the approved information, package and materials that would say, 'I cannot help you with this, but here are the materials, the number for the VAD navigator service and the people who can help you'. You cannot restrict people from accessing these services even if you as a medical practitioner choose not to participate in the process.

We also make first mention of our standard timely timeframes for keeping the process moving. Recommendation 16(b) mentions two business days, which is to say that the medical practitioner has to notify the person whether they accept or refuse that first request for VAD within two business days. That is the kind of standard we have tried to maintain throughout the entirety of the suite of recommendations.

Recommendation 17 is about the first doctor involved in the assessment process ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, it has just hit midday. Would you like to conclude your comments, or would you like to continue?

Dr RAHMAN: No, I would like to continue my comments.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Fong Lim, I have been in this Chamber for 15 years, and I do not remember anyone speaking for as long as you have spoken this morning: one hour and 45 minutes. It is extraordinary. I am not gagging your debate, but I think it is extraordinary for me and probably people sitting in this place that you even intend to continue further.

The skill of a parliamentarian is usually to be succinct, concise and able to deliver a speech within a restricted timeframe. A tabling statement is unlimited, but I do not think you should be taking that literally. It is an important topic. A lot of people in this Chamber intend to talk on this topic, and I ask you to be mindful of trying to be a little more concise about the remaining content of your speech. Although your timeframe is unlimited, it is not to be abused. I do not want to gag debate. You can continue talking for hours if you like, but I do not think that is in the best interest of the intent of this Assembly, the standing orders and what people expect. On that note ...

Dr RAHMAN: Madam Speaker, may I ...

Madam SPEAKER: No, you cannot. I suspend the Assembly for lunch.

Debate suspended.

The Assembly suspended.

NOTICES

J DAVIS (Johnston): Mr Deputy Speaker, I give notice that on the next General Business day I shall present an amended General Business notice number 1 standing in my name:



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

LCAC VAD FINAL REPORT TABLING
STATEMENT PART 2

TUESDAY 14 OCTOBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Mr Young: They are being blocked.

Mr EDGINGTON: Can I answer the question?

Madam SPEAKER: Cease interjecting.

Mr EDGINGTON: Each local authority receives money from their council which is provided from the Northern Territory Government, and each authority can determine what the priorities are for their community. Each local authority makes recommendations to their council on where that money should be spent.

When it comes to decision-making about where local authority money should be spent, those recommendations are made to the council of the day, not to the department of Local Government. The local authorities determine the priorities and make recommendations to their council on where the money should be spent.

The Member for Daly is saying—or he is alleging, I should say, because nothing has been presented to my office suggesting that there is a problem. If the Member for Daly has a problem, he should come to me as the minister ...

Mr Young: Respond to their emails.

Ms Uibo: He is asking the question now.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... and talk about the issues, because coming to parliament and putting this on the table with no evidence to back it up other than a question to me—nothing has been presented to my office that I am aware of ...

Mr Young: I have the evidence, mate.

Madam SPEAKER: Okay, stop the interjections.

Mr EDGINGTON: ... but I would be happy to speak to the Member for Daly further about this. Each local authority makes recommendations to their council about where that money should be spent. If you have any further evidence to ...

Mr YOUNG: A point of order, Madam Speaker! Standing Order 110; relevance. The question is: will you support the Wadeye Local Authority to ensure that their funding can be spent on the Wadeye swimming pool? They have come to me and said that your government told them that they cannot.

Madam SPEAKER: You have made your point, Member for Daly. Minister, you have the call. I think you were already answering it.

Mr EDGINGTON: I will make this clearer because the Member for Daly is struggling to understand what I am telling him. That is not unusual for the Member for Daly because he does not seem to get the basics. I will say once more that local authorities receive their funding from their council. They make recommendations to their council on what the priorities are and where that money should be spent. If the council has issues with those priorities, they should tell the local authority. If the member has any further queries he can see me about it. I will be happy to talk to him.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that any further questions be placed on the Written Question Paper.

PAPER TABLED
Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee Report on the
Inquiry into Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Northern Territory

Continued from earlier this day.

Dr RAHMAN (Chair of Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee): Madam Speaker, continuing from where I finished before lunch, recommendation 17 of the report sets the standard for a doctor who will make an assessment on voluntary assisted dying. The nomenclature becomes increasingly important to recognise in this House as we move forward to explain to the public how VAD will work in practice.

It is a two-stage process. The first stage is to have what we regard in the Australian VAD model as the coordinating practitioner.

Recommendation 17 specifies that the coordinating practitioner must assess whether the person is eligible and meets all of the eligibility criteria.

Recommendation 18 is about the second doctor. This is the clear point about the fact that the VAD process in the Australian model is rigorous. It requires multiple checks and balances in order to make sure that VAD is not used in the wrong way or abused.

Recommendation 18 is about the consulting practitioner—again, a medical practitioner. The key thing with the consulting practitioner—it is confusing, I appreciate—is that they are not a ‘consultant’ practitioner. There is a difference in nomenclature. Two people who are accredited medical practitioners of equal standing—it does not require that the second one is a higher authority, a specialist or a consultant, as it were—must sign off on that process as well to determine whether somebody is eligible to be a candidate for VAD.

Recommendation 19 is about making sure that the assessment process involves the discussion of a plan for administering the VAD substance further down the track.

Recommendation 20 is about the referrals process and the duties. It is the case that things happen and change, and doctors who sign into the process may be subbed out of the process. If and when they are it becomes necessary to make sure that we do not frustrate the intentions of people who are terminally ill and suffering and are unable to otherwise complete their VAD service. There is a mechanism within this for referrals, such that a coordinating or consulting practitioner can refer their role to another person if so required.

These are the kind of nooks and crannies of the law that are required that are not fully countenanced by the public when we are talking about, ‘Do you support VAD, yea or nay?’

It is true that once upon a time the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act essentially set up a standard whereby two separate medical practitioners could make a determination about whether somebody would be a fit candidate for voluntary euthanasia. At that time in that Bill, the system was more cumbersome in the sense that there was a requirement in the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act for a psychiatrist to sign off on whether a terminally ill person should be a viable candidate for VAD. Even the proponents of the original Rights of the Terminally Ill Act would now argue that it was an unnecessary step that we did not need to take.

It is a clear example of where the world, the law and the Australian position has moved on, such that it is now necessary for us to work within the modern paradigm and make sure we have the checks and balances that are required within the system to provide equitable access to voluntary assisted dying should we so choose to legislate for it, but also safe and practical access.

Recommendation 21 is about eligible witnesses for the formal request process. Once two doctors have signed off on somebody as being an eligible candidate, there is still a process to seek formal request. That must be approved in an approved form and signed by the patient in the presence of two eligible witnesses. The person must certify that they are making that request voluntarily and understand the process they are agreeing to.

Recommendation 22 makes it clear that if someone cannot sign those documents, they can do so with someone else’s assistance. That person cannot be the coordinating or consulting practitioner or one of the two witnesses. Again, these are the standardised checks and balances now embedded into the system. We have to provision for a mechanism that will allow people to access VAD but that we know cannot reasonably be expected to be abused. That is exactly the situation we would face if we were to adopt a more lenient strategy.

Recommendation 23 prescribes the eligibility requirements to act as a witness. This includes, again, that someone must be 18 years old, only one of the two witnesses can be a beneficiary under the person’s will and that, likewise, the coordinating and consulting practitioners and whoever else should not be permitted to witness the formal request. These are clear checks and balances to provide for a safe system for people to part of or opt out of.

Recommendation 24 provides something novel that is not provided in the rest of Australia. Again, this is a key departure from the standard in the rest of Australia. We are now providing protocols to do things via video because we recognise that there are segments of our population with lower literacy and capacity to provide

written consent. Not only that—we recognise that people who are terminally ill in places that are far flung and away from urban centres may require assistance to provide robust consent. Video protocols are now embedded for the first time, which is not provisioned for anywhere else in the country.

It may be the case that video consent is a more preferable option to written consent in a number of instances, when you think about the Northern Territory context. Notwithstanding, we have provided in the recommendations for the formalities that we believe should be satisfied, including that any video includes but is not limited to the coordinating practitioner being present to witness it; the person clearly identifying themselves, and who they are; and the person clearly making declarations to the effect that they are providing their consent.

Providing consent is difficult enough when you are sick, ill and remote, let alone if English is also not your first language. We know that in the Northern Territory a huge number of people do not speak English as a first language. Some of them are from culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and other people in Indigenous communities may speak English as a second, third, fourth or fifth language. Recommendation 25 is where we begin to discuss interpreters that are required to certify materials and that the interpreter must also be a qualified translator when required.

In recommendation 26 we have not adopted an arbitrary timeline, but we have adopted the standardised timeline between phases of requests. There is essentially nine days of what you could otherwise call a cooling-off period between making the first request and then making a formal request. Things cannot just happen like that on a whim or by accident. That is an important cooling-off period.

Brought up regularly and consistently to the committee in community was, 'Once I make a decision to start this process, can I back out?'—absolutely; at any stage up until administration you can back out. You can make a first request, have two doctors sign off on it, arrange for administration, have practitioners come to visit you and you can change your mind on the day. There is nothing to say that people should not have choice in this system; that has been the guiding principle for our committee on this whole process. We want to provide for access to VAD, but we want to make sure that anybody, whether they are an institution or an individual, has the option to withdraw from the process without fear or favour. That is an important unique principle that we are moving further on than the rest of the country, including with respect to the notion of cultural safety, which I shall come to later.

Recommendation 27 again provides accreditation requirements for interpreters, because it became exceedingly clear while we were out and about that, just like everything else, we have a shortage of interpreters. In many places it is extremely difficult to find interpreters who are conversant with local languages and who are not also family members or connected to people. It is difficult to find the right interpreters who are sufficiently and suitably accredited.

That is why, under recommendation 27(d), we have provided for the review board being authorised to overrule the requirements for meeting the minimum requirements when no other suitable interpreter is available. That is a practical reality. There will be instances when language, translation or interpreter services cannot be provided unless you use people who have some sort of interest in the sick party. Recognising the pragmatic reality of the paucity of interpreters in the Northern Territory is extremely important.

As a tangential matter, it has not made it into our report, but we note that standards on accreditation for interpreters and translators have changed in recent years. In an effort to raise the bar, we have limited the pool in some ways of people available to help out, particularly in the bush, on these issues.

Recommendation 28 is about transfers at the request of the patient. The coordinating practitioner's role must also be provisioned to be able to be transferred.

Recommendation 29 relates to telehealth, which has become a casual thought without detailed consideration necessarily. If you take the time to go through many hours of witness testimony, you will find that everywhere we went, we asked 'Tell us about how telehealth works in your particular place? Is it working? Is it not?'

The reality is that we found that there are significant deficits in the use of telehealth. In some places the connectivity is just not good enough. In some places the hardware infrastructure is not good enough. In some places there are no suitable translators or interpreters even if you have working infrastructure. But that is not everywhere. There are a number of places where we learned that telehealth works exceedingly well.

The medical profession has by and large, through the Health department and the AMA, made it clear to us that it would like for telehealth to be provisioned for and to be used in VAD. In other states and territories,

increasingly, there are calls to allow telehealth to be used as part of the VAD process. However, at the moment, telehealth is not authorised under the Commonwealth *Criminal Code Act 1995* in relation to incitement by a carriage service.

In the same way you cannot use technology to incite someone to suicide through other means, you cannot use telehealth in this space. It is a grey zone. The reality is that some components of the VAD process are being subtly used in a grey zone in some jurisdictions. Our thinking at this stage is that we have provision for, if and when telehealth is more widely used, we could use it too. But in the first instance, VAD should be an in-person experience and process as a default position.

Recommendation 30 regarding administration makes clear that people must make unambiguous decisions regarding administration.

Recommendation 31 recognises that people struggle in relation to whether administration must be supervised or not. The fact is that is a difficult question that we spent a lot of time thinking about. In the Northern Territory context, we came to the consensus position that we want not to frustrate people who may be in remote areas, a cattle station or somewhere far flung or who may choose self-administration in an urban setting and do not necessarily want a doctor present for the process.

There are additional complexities when somebody is self-administering. You have to think about how they will access the substance, how they will take it and what will happen after the fact. That is why there are clear delineated rules for self-administration versus practitioner administration. We want to support people to make choices again.

A person who makes self-administration decisions may still request to have a healthcare worker present, and that healthcare worker is permitted to assist in the process but not administer in the process. That is a clear thing because we are trying to offer people the option to have support when they want it in their final stages. Not everybody has the benefit of being surrounded by friends, family and loved ones. Some people will elect to have a healthcare worker present based on testimony from other parts of the country.

Recommendation 32 is about the self-administration situation and notes that you require a contact person. It is fact that somebody has to accept legal obligations to provide information to the review board about the patient and what has happened. Somebody will have to, in the ordinary course of events, potentially collect a substance, return the residual of the substance and notify the relevant authorities. So we provided a standardised prompt two working days for the contact person to provide that information to try to keep the wheels moving.

Recommendation 33 makes clear that the contact person is legally permitted to receive, possess, handle, prepare and supply the VAD substance but that they also have explicit obligations to return unused substances, to report the person's death and to provide information to the review board as requested. These are the realities and nooks and crannies of VAD that people need to understand.

Recommendation 34 is about the two business days, again, of notifying the review board.

In recommendation 35 we consider in detail what a prescription must consider because pharmacy has been a critical part of this which was almost overlooked in the early stages and became a curly question. Without wanting to derail all of what we are saying, there have been challenging situations in recent times when pharmacy protocols have not been followed perfectly, and it has led to people having to remediate.

For the most part we have a clear situation where VAD has been used safely and effectively across the country utilising the Australian standard, but there are exceptions. Those exceptions are worth knowing about so that we enter this process advisedly and do not make mistakes that other places have made. What does that mean for the Northern Territory? In practice, we have two great hospital pharmacy setups in Darwin and Alice Springs that have sufficient robust controls to house, safely store and dispose of pharmacological substances, and perhaps we do not want dangerous substances in locked boxes in other places that may not be as secure. We have tried as best as possible to think through these possibilities.

Recommendation 36 prescribes that we should consider definitions in the context of that space: who should be an authorised supplier; who should be an authorised disposer; and written information that should be provided to people to guide them on how to self-administer, to authenticate prescriptions and to return VAD substances, along with guidance in that space.

Recommendation 37 is about timely reporting to the review board, which is an extremely important part of this process for us.

Recommendation 38 is about practitioner administration decisions, and this is the critical decision. Some people will elect to self-administer; a good number also choose to allow a practitioner to do that. For that process to happen you require eligible witnesses to practitioner administration, people who need to witness and certify on the approved form that the person was acting voluntarily, without coercion, and that the administering practitioner administered the VAD substance in the presence of that witness. Certification needs to be provided to the review board within a couple of days for those processes.

Recommendation 39 again notes that, as with the two doctors making the assessment, the administering practitioner can transfer their role to another practitioner. We do not want people to be frustrated in the process. We have a paucity of options available for people who may engage in the service, but we need to provision for the most practical application of VAD.

Recommendation 40 notes that the coordinating and administering practitioner must notify the review board within two business days of the death of the person and that they died as a consequence of the VAD process.

Recommendation 41 is self-explanatory in relation to the cause of death certificate.

Recommendation 42 specifies, consistent with earlier recommendation on destigmatisation, that the underlying eligible terminal illness, disease or medical condition should be nominated as the cause of death.

Recommendation 43, so as not to unduly burden our Coroner, as was the case in some other jurisdictions because of ill-conceived legislation, that a VAD death is not necessarily a reportable death for the purposes of the *Coroners Act*. There is always the provision for things to be referred to the Coroner as and when required, but it is not an ex-officio default position.

Recommendation 44 is about the level of experience required by the people involved in this process. Nowhere in Australia have trainee medical graduates been involved in the VAD process, but there are other places that have varying degrees of expertise assigned to medical practitioners. We settled on the most common position that is also supported by the 2024 inquiry report, which is that medical practitioners must have at least five years of general registration or one year of specialist registration, in which case they essentially have the five years of general registration as well.

Essentially, we are saying that people who are standalone doctors and able to practise without training wheels are allowed to make decisions about VAD. That means we can tap into our public and private system by making sure that we have a decentralised model of VAD service delivery.

Recommendation 45 is about mandatory training. Even if you are a standalone doctor, you still must have completed the authorised prescribed training that the Department of Health CEO will have developed. There will be mandatory training for people to have completed to make sure that VAD is delivered uniformly, equitably and safely.

Recommendation 46 notes that the coordinating and consulting practitioners cannot be family members of the person requesting VAD or a beneficiary of the will of the person accessing VAD. Again, these are critical distinctions that need to be made on the front end.

Recommendation 47 is about providing flexibility in administration because once the difficult decisions have been made by doctors about whether somebody is an eligible person we recognise that it is not necessary for a doctor to be the person who administers a VAD substance; rather, an administering practitioner could be a qualified medical practitioner, a nurse practitioner or a registered nurse who has practised in the nursing profession for more than five years. We say this because we know that it is nurses, particularly out bush and in communities, who have close contact with people in their end-of-life care and potentially in relation to a VAD service.

Recommendation 48 again makes clear that, like with doctors, administering practitioners must have completed the standard mandatory training to be determined. We have advised, and we note in our testimony, that we could create economies of scale by working with other jurisdictions to find out their processes in relation to training. We do not need to reinvent the wheel on everything to do with VAD. If we want anyone to be able to practically access it any time within the foreseeable future, we will need to be agile in relation to working with other jurisdictions to benefit from their wisdom, experience and potentially training collateral.

Recommendation 49 notes that administrating practitioners again cannot be related to and cannot be beneficiaries under the will of the person.

Recommendation 50 notes that the relevant persons involved in providing or supporting the provision of healthcare services who conscientiously object can do so.

Recommendation 51 is a key NT-based consideration where you think about the people who can conscientiously object from the process. People who conscientiously object from the process are not just limited to a couple of doctors and nurses. In the Northern Territory we have a huge ecosystem of Indigenous healthcare and people who are essentially Aboriginal health workers and liaison officers by a range of different names, and under any standard legislation across the country those people are afforded no specific protections or indemnities.

We note that relevant persons involved in providing or supporting the provision of health or care services—which is a much broader category—should have the right to refuse to do any of the following: to provide information about VAD; to participate in the processes; to participate in administration; to prescribe or administer substances; and to be present at the time of the administration of a substance. If you are somebody who is uncomfortable, as a person who works in the Aboriginal health ecosystem, with participating in this, you can step away from it and will be entitled to do so under the provisions that we have championed within this document.

Recommendation 52 is about the duty to refer and/or inform for conscientious objectors. As we have made clear, you do not have to participate but you cannot actively block somebody who is otherwise terminally ill and requires access to information from getting to that information. At a minimum we say that the person must be given information about a healthcare practitioner or service that is likely to assist them, as well as the contact details of the official government state-sanctioned VAD navigator service.

Recommendation 54 is about health or care entities, noting that covers not just public and private hospitals and hospices but also residential aged-care facilities, nursing homes and other facilities. In the Northern Territory that is important because places outside of Darwin and Alice Springs have a limited number of providers of aged care, palliative care, disability care and even primary healthcare on occasions. Some of those organisations are auspiced by entities that do not necessarily want to be involved in VAD, so we have to specify who is who in this carefully.

Recommendation 55 is unique in Australia in that we have suggested that the Northern Territory should extend the opportunity for institutional objection and allow it to be permissible. The committee recommends that health or care entities that object to VAD may refuse to participate in VAD. For argument's sake, there is an aged-care facility that is auspiced by a church somewhere out bush. If that entity is uncomfortable with VAD being something it does within its premises, then it is allowed to make that choice. We are not compelling anyone to do anything they do not want to do.

However, we make it clear in that process under recommendation 56 that organisation or facility should make clear to the people residing in that facility that this is not a VAD facility. It is not a place that participates in VAD-related services. That is an acceptable compromise in the context of rights for the people on the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee. It must advertise its position publicly and notify persons in the health or care entity, including residents and patients who wish to access VAD, of its position, which we think is a reasonable compromise.

Recommendation 57 is about not blocking people at the door. You would not believe the stories that have come out in other jurisdictions of these things not being thought through. A sick person in the facility who does not want the VAD service then has proponents, practitioners or advocates knocking and trying to come through the front door and essentially being blocked. That causes a scene and upset for everyone. It is extremely important that we make it clear what everyone's rights and responsibilities are in this regard.

In essence, we said that the health or care entity must provide the person with contact details of the navigator service which then can help them. They must allow reasonable access to the person at the health or care entity by a member or employee of the official navigator service and, in general, not hinder the person's access to information. Information should be accessible to all Territorians.

Recommendation 58 is about not prohibiting or preventing an employee or healthcare worker onsite from initiating conversations. Again, we had testimony throughout our witness transcripts of people who made clear that previously patients wanted this information and simply could not receive it. However, under recommendation 59 it is clear that the relevant steps in the VAD process—the making of a first or formal

request for VAD, the undergoing of a first or second assessment, the making of an administration decision and the administration of a substance—are things that an entity can object to participating in.

Recommendation 60 is the requirement to reasonably assist when somebody who is extremely sick or cannot move around is in a facility where they want access to VAD but the facility does not provide it. All we have asked for in that instance is for the health or care entity to take reasonable steps to facilitate the transfer of the person to—and, if required, from—a place where the relevant steps in the VAD process can be carried out. We want to prioritise choice and voluntariness.

Recommendation 61 is where we move to establishing the VAD review board in the Northern Territory. In recommendation 62 we make clear that the completed cases must be notified to the VAD board.

Recommendation 63 is where the powers of the VAD board are specified. They are broad and important powers, but they must be clearly specified powers at the outset to monitor the operation; review completed cases; refer instances of non-compliance to the Police Commissioner, the Coroner, Aboriginal health services and any number of parties that are relevant; collect, record, use and keep data so that we can learn from this process and maintain best practice; report to the minister or the CEO of the Department of Health in relation to the operation of the legislation, the board's functions or improvement of the processes; promote compliance; set standards; and maintain continuous improvement.

Recommendation 64 notes that there must be information provided at regular intervals to the Coroner, including the number of completed cases. We do not want to bury the Coroner in each bit of paperwork surrounding VAD processes, but Coroners must be informed of the number of complete cases.

Recommendation 65 is about requesting information and the board's power to request information for the purpose of exercising its function from the CEO of the department, treating practitioners and contract persons to maintain integrity in the process.

Recommendation 66 maintains that the board must act independently and in the public interest. It is, by default, not subject to direction from anyone, including the minister, about how it performs its functions.

There is a logical tautology—an inconsistency in that—a circular piece of logic in the sense that if you have this embedded within the Health department, of course there are lines of reporting that blend and become circular. If you refer to the testimony from 5 September, you will find that the Health department, when presented with the option, suggested it is possible. It would be unusual and has not been done elsewhere, but it is possible for us to use existing health structures and statutory powers under the Office of the Chief Health Officer to administrate a review board with integrity and separation from the minister and government.

Recommendation 67 is that the board is to be provided with the resources reasonably necessary to do its job. Set the board up to fail, and you can be sure that governance will fail on VAD as it has been tested in other places on occasion.

Recommendation 68 is about, on the recommendation of the Chief Health Officer, the membership of the board being assigned by the minister, which includes people with sufficient experience to do the job but also sufficient geographic and regional characteristics and spread to reflect the NT community and its diversity.

To that effect, in recommendation 69 we have specified a minimum composition for the board: the Chief Health Officer or another delegated person by the Chief Health Officer; one member who has clinical expertise, including medical or nursing; one member who has legal expertise; importantly, one member who is an Aboriginal person in a position to provide and seek advice from First Nations peoples in relation to cultural matters; and one member who is also employed or representative of an Aboriginal community-controlled health organisation (ACCHO).

The service provision and model for care in the Northern Territory is shifting from entirely state-based provision, so ACCHOs are important to have representation in that space. That is not the total composition; that is the minimum composition. Those things may be prescribed and added to in the future by regulations and by the department.

Recommendation 70 is a clear expression of the fact that the Chief Health Officer should be the chairperson of the board. The reason we made that decision was specific; the Chief Health Officer position already has statutory powers and uses existing structures, and it is not a huge ask for us to build adjunct work under the auspices of the Chief Health Officer to manage VAD and the review board. We think that is a pragmatic, cost-

effective and reasonable way forward in terms of safeguards. Recommendation 71 provides for a deputy chairperson.

Recommendation 72 provides that cultural safety must be a consideration in these discussions. The committee had a diversity of opinion on a range of issues including this, but this is our consolidated position. This is our compromised position on everything. This is the first report in living memory that has not had a flood of dissenting reports surrounding it. That is because across the political spectrum the five committee members, ably assisted by the committee secretariat, did their best to find common denominator positions to progress the VAD agenda for Territorians.

Recommendation 73 is about the nuts and bolts of what happens on the board—the board administration. It is inane stuff, but if you do not specify from the outset the terms and appointment of the board, vacations of office, conditions of appointments and proceedings, they are not specified elsewhere. We recommend those things should be specified in the legislation.

Recommendation 74 is about annual reporting to the minister and the frequency of doing so.

Recommendation 75 is about how regularly the minister must table a copy of the annual report to the Legislative Assembly. That should happen in a timely and prompt manner so that this Assembly is always aware of what is happening in the VAD space.

Recommendation 76 makes definitions in relation to the reviewable decisions and eligible persons.

Recommendation 77 specifies that an eligible person can apply to NTCAT to seek review of a reviewable decision. That is an extremely important mechanism. We need bodies to have oversight of appeals processes on eligibility and, quite frankly, if and when things go wrong. NTCAT is the appropriate forum, notwithstanding that nothing in the NT legislation would affect the inherent jurisdiction of the Supreme Court to hear matters pertaining to VAD.

Recommendation 78 prescribes that the legislation should be reviewed three years after its day of commencement and every five years thereafter after the first review. That is consistent with the Australian position. Some people would like there to be a continuous process of review, but we did not think that was necessary. We think we have enough information to set this up sensibly on the front end, for it to be operational within a couple of years and then for there to be reviews thereafter.

The review must consider the principles set out in the legislation, the eligibility criteria and whether the legislation is operating as intended. We say that because we know that things are likely to change in the VAD space around the country. Other jurisdictions are starting to look at reviewing their legislation and adapting things. It may be the case that by the time we reach the review stage we are thinking more broadly about principles, eligibility and operation, and we may want to refine our processes. Embedding it on the front end is important to say, 'These are the things you should be looking at' when we first do a stocktake. A number of reviews are happening around the country in relation to VAD processes; we have learned a lot from them, and submissions have been made by some of the review boards to us.

Recommendation 79 is about the creation of new offences—again, not things that you turn your mind to when thinking, 'Do you support VAD? Yay or nay?' The fact is that when you create a VAD ecosystem you create opportunities for new offences to be committed. Some offences could be extremely serious; some could be more minor. Serious offences would include things like the unauthorised administration of a VAD substance, inducing a person to request VAD and inducing a person to self-administer; those are the horror scenarios that none of us want to happen, but we must create serious offences in the legislation to account for those things from the get-go. Likewise, to knowingly provide false or misleading information, statements or documents to the review board is an offence which must be created. We also need to create offences for non-compliance relating to procedural requirements by health practitioners or contact persons, for example, failing to return a substance within a timely period.

Recommendation 80 is about liability and exemptions for participation in VAD. We provide for the fact that a person will not be criminally, civilly or professionally, as relevant, liable for assisting somebody with the VAD process, being present or acting in accordance with the legislation.

Recommendation 81 is the same thing but for health practitioners' indemnity, which is slightly different. Health practitioners will not be criminally, civilly or professionally, as relevant, liable for referring a patient who requests VAD services.

Recommendation 82 is about refraining from administering life-sustaining treatment. Under VAD circumstances, if people who are normally professionally obliged to provide life-sustaining treatment believe on reasonable grounds that a person was dying after receiving a VAD substance and that the person does not request lifesaving treatment, they would not be liable for not providing that. Think about paramedics in that context.

Recommendation 83 is about the fact that, notwithstanding all those indemnities for criminal, civil and professional liability, complaints are still possible. You can still make a complaint to the relevant oversight body, whether it is the review board, NTCAT or the Supreme Court.

There is a range of miscellaneous provisions under recommendation 84, recognising, for example, that technical errors on a form should not invalidate processes as they have frustrated them elsewhere on occasion and, likewise, that the CEO of the Department of Health should be empowered to establish an official VAD navigator service and work out who supplies and disposes of substances, what VAD substances will be in this jurisdiction, approved information, training and forms.

A huge body of work needs to be done to provide the structure and framework to be able to provision for VAD. Our position is that it would be prudent to work with other jurisdictions to try to license some of their collateral, if possible, but that will be determined over 18 months of implementation, which is the focus of recommendation 85.

It is standard across Australian parliaments that there be an 18-month implementation period after legislation has been enacted. That is why people ask us, for example, about the ACT and why its numbers are still zero. It is because the ACT has not started implementing VAD in practice for patients yet. That will start at the end of this calendar year at the conclusion of the 18-month implementation timeframe.

Recommendation 86 recommends that the government implements a culturally safe and accessible public information campaign during and after the implementation phase. One of the most consistent things in our witness data is people saying, 'I do not know much about this; can you tell me more?' A lot of our witness testimony is about having an iterative discussion to explain to people what we are talking about and them saying that they would like more information as this develops and changes. It will be an important job of the Department of Health to maintain communications if it is to oversee a VAD process after the introduction of legislation which the government has at this stage committed to.

The drafting instructions, Appendix 3 of the document, are the distillation of those 86 recommendations and a clear-cut blueprint. You can get a digested form of many of these things by simply reading this, but you will fail to see the context or the support for the position. Instead, for the most part, all of us are working with imperfect data regarding this agenda. 'How many people support VAD? Do they support it in my community? What type of VAD are we talking about?'—we will fast approach the situation where it will be incumbent on everyone in this House to seek answers to those questions to make sure you can say with conviction that you made a decision on behalf of your constituents or that is representative of them or some combination thereof.

There are limits to how much you can test people's opinions, so running referendums on the drafting instructions is not the suggestion; we suggest that when there is a Bill perhaps that should be the thing the people are tested on in relation to their yes or no answer, or before there is a Bill perhaps we may test some of the key propositions, like whether people are generally supportive of a requirement on prognosis being dispensed with, in line with the ACT.

One of the things that I wanted to see in the report, which is not included in any form, is mention of the limitations of the inquiry and the research design. The great irony is that the fundamental limitation of the research design and the inquiry was time. The absence of time is also why we did not talk about limitations and the things that could have been done better. It is good practice, in my opinion, in academic research and works like this to acknowledge that we did not do everything perfectly.

We simply could not do everything perfectly. The task put before us was significant. The commitment collectively by the group was to advance the task as best as possible within the time allocated. On 1 September the committee, across party lines, uniformly asked for extra time to present our final report a few months later, but the government asked us to provide it by the end of September as it initially intended, and we achieved that.

That is a positive development, and the right decision has potentially been made in that regard, but it has come at a cost. The cost was that we have had to compromise on every part of the process being perfectly

executed. The only way that this VAD inquiry would ever be done and delivered was for us to multitask, so we had to wait until we had a consultation report before we could start thinking about where we would go. We went out and about as best we could, but at the same time we were collecting written submissions which we could not read before figuring out where to go. Hansard can only work so fast to process crazy numbers of transcripts from hearings out bush, so we were waiting on those transcripts to figure out what was happening before we could move forward again.

Time was the fundamental limitation of the inquiry and the research design. It meant that not all processes were conducted with the rigour that I would have liked. Nevertheless, the important point to make is that in spite of all the limitations, a short timeframe, the pressures of the subject matter and having to do things in a compressed and pressurised environment, we produced a substantive representative dataset from across the Northern Territory that adds huge value.

I do not seek to politicise the issue, but I acknowledge the Chief Minister's remarks from earlier that we have added knowledge to existing knowledge by recognising that there was never full, complete and comprehensive data collection and consultation in remote Indigenous communities.

Would we have liked to do more? Absolutely. Would we like to do more in the future? Potentially. All of this is true but, notwithstanding those limitations, we still got to many places, spoke to many people and received many written submissions.

I brought along all 400 submissions with a view to talking about some of them but, in the interests of being sporting, I will not. I note that the written submissions make for fine reading. The important thing to recognise in the written submissions is that some are hundreds of pages long and some are two lines long, but every one mattered to me and my colleagues on this committee. People should look at them because they explain reasonable and unreasonable objections and opinions. Some people simply want to say, point blank, 'I do not want it. That is all I have to say.' That is fine. There are other people saying, 'This is great. You should have already done it.' That may not be super helpful, but it adds to our body of knowledge.

All those people deserve to be heard, but we have not been able to—again, because of time limitations—provide, for example, qualitative and quantitative metrics pointing out how many of these things we somehow squished into the final report and how many people were fully heard.

The written submissions are worth reading and not as daunting as they look. There are complex, large and dense submissions. For example, submission 6 from Professor White, before we appointed him as an expert advisor, includes a long list of extremely potent academic literature regarding this. There are hundreds of pages of that submission.

Meanwhile, other things are one-liners—yes or no answers. It all matters, and I assure Territorians that if they do not see their name in a footnote in the report, it does not mean we ignored their submission or that we do not think it is valuable. We read all of it. Everybody worked extremely hard to process it all as fast as we could to produce the best work we could within a limited time.

To progress the issue, members of the Assembly will now essentially need survey data of their own. Everybody will have to go out and test in some defensible, empirically justifiable and quantifiable way what support for VAD is in their community. I assure you that if people come out saying that they are for or against this proposition on the basis of whose door they last knocked on and not much else, somebody else will skewer you and be unhappy.

This is an issue of life and death. It is worth everybody making an effort to do the best they can to survey their electorate. That may be through a newsletter, a phone canvass or a digital survey online. It could be any number of things, but I encourage you all to start that process now because existing sets of information that we have are extremely imperfect. None of them clearly spell out that 99% of people support VAD. All we have is a set of polarised opinions, but we do not have good, robust data to indicate the level of support for VAD across the Northern Territory.

One of the fundamental things I take objection to is the idea that all Indigenous people are the same, think the same and believe the same things. It is simply not true. Presented with the opportunity to express themselves, Indigenous people from across the Northern Territory—as best as we could cover it—expressed a vast diversity of opinions.

Many people are opposed to VAD and, culturally, do not want to participate in it. There are others—the majority, I would say, in our dataset—for whom there is a laissez-faire attitude of, 'It is not for me, but I do

not mind if other people have it'. There is other testimony from Indigenous people from out bush in remote communities who are not only for it but have even had interactions with voluntary euthanasia in the past. That is extremely important testimony, findings and data that has not seen the light of day before and helps us understand that we are all fundamentally human and nobody wants to die a painful death; everyone wants to have a good finishing up—whatever that might look like.

We produced a substantive, representative dataset that adds considerable value to our understanding of euthanasia or voluntary assisted dying. Everyone should engage with, to some extent, the rich and nuanced data from witnesses to understand exactly what we found out bush.

I will not be forensic about it, but I will point out some broad, overarching highlights of what we learned in the places we have been to. This is the rich, qualitative data that is new and teaches us what might be suitable for the Northern Territory.

Broadly speaking, the committee endeavoured to be essentially on the road for a month. That is a significant commitment. All the other committee members have families and obligations; I just have a garden I am killing. I have the least obligations, but everybody else gave up precious time with their children, partners and families to be out and about and engage all over the Territory—occasionally at risk of life and limb; I will not tell the tale, but at least one of our light aircraft had to make an emergency landing in Tindal.

We were able to cover some, but not all, of the Territory but enough for this to be a representative dataset. In essence, whilst we definitely got off the beaten track, we still focused our efforts on four primary locations. The first was Darwin; here we conducted testimony and hearings with public officials under perfect conditions, which is why we could get perfectly timed *Hansard*, ask more deep and meaningful questions and have everything in the public domain as quickly as possible.

To the many people who have reached out behind the scenes, wanting the information, that information was out first for practical reasons, not for any nefarious purpose to hide any other information.

Thereafter, consultations we did in Darwin involved Aboriginal communities coming to us. We started our process on day one by reaching out to the Chairs of the former independent expert inquiry, the heads of all the land councils and the head of AMSANT because we knew that going out bush and consulting with people in remote regional areas meant having the cooperation of people there. We extended the olive branch.

For the most part people did not immediately leap at the opportunity to cooperate with our inquiry, but with time as word got around that we were giving this a fair go across party lines to try to gather real information—with a Greens member, a member of the Labor Party and three members of the CLP—we had people coming to us. Representatives from Tarntipi Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, Wurrumiyanga and the Tiwi mob made time to talk to us en masse from the Tiwis. Maningrida sent an entire delegation of people to us in parliament. We could not make it to them, and they decided this was sufficiently important for them to make it to us.

I reject any suggestion that these consultations were not credible. These consultations were imperfect, and bush consultations involved trying to use technical equipment in odd circumstances and places, sometimes with things not going exactly as they would if we were collecting testimony in the parliamentary committee rooms upstairs in Parliament House. However, they were credible consultations, geographically dispersed across the Territory and representative of the views of Territorians generally, not just Indigenous Territorians.

Then there was a second sweep of consultations where we learned a tonne of things, which I consider the community hearing consultations, in Ngukurr, Borroloola, Barunga, Gunbalanya, Papunya and Numbulwar. Each of those places was a separate consultation involving day-long processes and multiple stakeholders. We are indebted to the people in and around the Roper Gulf region and for the cooperation we received from the Leader of the Opposition in helping us to facilitate that. We are grateful for the bipartisan work we have done in this in this space and for the fact that we could produce a report without any dissenting reports; there is a reason for that. It is because we tried hard under challenging circumstances to come up with a common denominator position—not a lowest common denominator position, but a common denominator position.

A third important sweep of consultations was based around Alice Springs. Alice Springs is not Darwin; the Centre is not the north, and all of what happens in the Centre cannot be collapsed into the same basket. We knew that from the outset, which is why we spent considerable time talking to people in Aboriginal engagement, at the hospital and in palliative care as well as to key protagonists like the Australian Christian Lobby. We did not shy away from having conversations. From the Old Timers centre and the Baptist Church we gained valuable data.

The final sweep of consultations was focused in the Barkly, which I am sure the Member for Barkly will be delighted to hear. Tennant Creek, Barkly, Pulkapulka Kari, disability services, Tennant Creek Mob Aboriginal Corporation, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association and Tennant Creek Hospital. I sadly could not participate in the last day of consultations because I ended up in Tennant Creek Hospital at short notice after getting food poisoning, but I can vouch for the fact that it is a fine facility. We collected data in every conceivable way, including in person.

What did we learn there? I would love to quote aspects and forensically point things out. You could write an entire PhD thesis on the data we collected supplementary to the report that is being presented to explain the rich and nuanced findings of the bush in relation to voluntary assisted dying, but I will just provide some signposts for other people who may wish to explore further in the future.

On 5 August we held an initial public hearing with the AMA NT, AMSANT and NT Health, which set up the foundations for our inquiry. What were our health providers' plans for VAD? Did they have a plan? Could they implement this? What would it take? We quickly discovered not that they had no idea but that we were in a chicken-and-egg situation with them saying, 'You tell us what the law is, and we will tell you whether we can do it', and us saying, 'You tell us what you can, and we will try to make a law that works with that'. It has been an iterative process for us to establish the right set of recommendations and tools to potentially provide a framework for VAD in the Northern Territory. The testimony from that day is important, as are the written submissions from the same providers that follow it.

Equally important for us on that first day and deliberately chosen was public testimony from private citizens. One private citizen we spoke to was Judy Dent. As most people involved with voluntary assisted dying in the Northern Territory will know, Judy Dent's husband was the first person to avail himself of an assisted death as a terminally ill person under the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act in 1995. It was important, humbling and necessary for us to hear from Ms Dent to remind ourselves that this is not just a technocratic puzzle—much as I might be making it seem so through my remarks to some extent; this is about human beings, people, a good life, a good death, humanity, compassion, the greater good and understanding that people have different perspectives and are entitled to have those perspectives.

In terms of establishing our set-up, 5 August was an important day. In Darwin we had two other insightful sessions. One of which was with the Tarrntipi Homelands Aboriginal Corporation, with a number of significant and senior people on a call from the Tiwis speaking to us in detail about dying on country. If you want to know what people have to say about dying on country, there is a tonne to be learned from that consultation.

The Maningrida delegation who flew in to meet with us gave some of the best testimony we had about the positives of telehealth. We heard in a number of places that telehealth, frankly, did not work well, could not be used effectively in criminal justice proceedings and should not be used in medical proceedings, but we learned that in Maningrida—albeit a large and well-resourced community—telehealth works well in many regards. That gave us hope for the fact that telehealth could be part of this equation and that we should not write it off completely. We learned about the positives of telehealth and service provision through the Maningrida process.

At the end on 5 September 2025 we wrapped up our consultations in Darwin by asking the AMA and the Department of Health to speak to us again on short notice about how to meaningfully deliver VAD. I cannot thank the witnesses enough for their generosity and honesty in being frank with us about the nuts and bolts of VAD and what it would take to make it work.

I do not want to quote extensively from this, but it is a question that comes up all the time. From page 20 of that testimony, I am quoting from my own words:

Mr CHAIR: *I need to, for the sake of the record, just get this there.*

Notwithstanding that service models will evolve, as you indicate in your written submission as we have discussed today, what we are looking at if we have a core centralised service in terms of practical impost in terms of time and resources is something in the order of: an increase of palliative care that the AMA today suggested would be 30%, palliative care potential cost impost extra that we require; plus potentially extra help in aged care, which we have not discussed in great detail, noting that we have seen deficits in aged-care facilities elsewhere; plus the potential for buildings, physical location, to be able to provide VAD services standalone, albeit not building a new hospital; plus at least some FTE being a number between—conversations we have had now—four and let us call it 10 people, but less than 10. Is it fair to say that those are the costs and resource imposts we are looking at to introduce a VAD service in the Northern Territory in the future, notwithstanding that service models may vary?

Dr BURGESS: *I think that is not unreasonable. I think the missing component we have not really touched on in that list is the review board ...*

Mr CHAIR: *Yes, sorry; I forgot that one on that list too. It is on my list.*

Dr BURGESS: *... and the pharmacy service which might be part of your FTE. The pharmacy service would be logically centralised within our hospital network.*

The point is that the Health department has been clear that it would like to help provide VAD but cannot do it without additional resources or by simply manipulating existing budgets. If we are to provide a VAD service, we cannot provide a Rolls-Royce for 20 people a year; it is not realistic or reasonable. We all know in this place that we have competing considerations when it comes to healthcare. We on the committee believe in equitable access to VAD and are proposing that there should be VAD legislation. That is why it is so important that this is done right, as the Chief Minister pointed out.

We are past the point when we can introduce any sort of VAD legislation and say, 'We will just use this one and figure out the rest later'. It is the honest truth that will not work or end well for anyone. Now, with the benefit of a report that has multi-party support, I am hopeful that my colleagues will concur with me that we should work together but that we should work from the starting position of utilising this report, this set of drafting instructions and this set of recommendations so that we get the right results for Territorians as soon as meaningfully possible.

Moving on to the body of stuff we learned in those bush consultations—Ngukurr was the first place we went. The truth is it was a little scrappy. We were refining our technique and consultative process and trying to conduct a town hall meeting with a church full of people; microphones were going everywhere, and we were hearing personalised stories. We learned so much that day; it was an excellent place for us to start our process.

The Borroloola Local Authority, on 7 August 2025, is where we first started getting clear expressions of how angry a lot of older Territorians are about the fact that the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was taken away. We heard loud and clear, 'It should never have gone. Why can't you bring it back? Do something about it.'

The Borroloola Local Authority was generous in squeezing us into its timetable and timeline for consultations and meetings within its council chambers that day.

In Barunga we heard multiple stories across multiple consultations—local stories from traditional owners and senior elders about clinics and service provision. The Barunga consultations were some of the best ones for us talking to everyday people, not through the filter of other voices or representatives of someone but talking to people on the ground who live in the community, have an opinion and wanted to express it when provided the opportunity.

Gunbalanya provided an important dataset that people should look at. We met on the school premises and discussed in detail with the principal and staff some of the curly questions about VAD. It is where we had some of the most clear-cut evidence of lived experience of Indigenous people with interaction with end-of-life care and euthanasia—not in a salacious or criminally prosecutable way, but in a way that acknowledged our shared humanity and the fact that nobody wants to die a painful death and everybody recognises that at the end of life we are all fragile creatures in need of help.

Our consultations in Papunya were the largest facilitated discussions we had. They were facilitated by none other than Alison Anderson, a former member of this Assembly, who was extremely gracious in running a mass community consultation which started off with, for want of a better word, outright hostility and ended with us learning a lot from one another. It was a great example of two-way learning and of us having a conversation, translating to people and learning about the importance of a VAD communication strategy going forward. People did not have a clear idea of what we are doing, and once they did they had a different perspective.

To be clear, there was overarching opposition to the idea of people in that Papunya community being involved with voluntary assisted dying in its ordinary form, but there was not blanket objection. There were important discussions about palliation, palliative sedation and people's interaction with healthcare through somebody who is as fierce and knowledgeable an advocate as Alison Anderson. At Papunya we learned a tonne.

Numbulwar is one of the few places that I am not in a position to provide personal testimony because I was absent that day. I am extremely grateful to the Member for Casuarina, Khoda Patel, who, on 13 minutes' notice, availed himself to get on a light aircraft to ensure the committee had a quorum to take testimony.

That was another situation where we had to be agile and had an imperfect set of circumstances, but under the auspices and careful management of the Deputy Chair and the Member for Wanguri, we collected valuable testimony in yet another setting that day.

Alice Springs, as I mentioned previously, was one of the most important places where we collected data on a number of fronts. We met with the Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy Unit of the Alice Springs Hospital and learned about the necessity to provision for conscientious objection, not just for doctors and nurses but for what you might call healthcare adjunct workers. We heard testimony from people who were interpreters, liaison officers and people who engage with Indigenous healthcare through the hospital who made it clear to us, 'I do not want to translate information on VAD as part of my job. I do not want to have these conversations and present this information. If this becomes a necessary job requirement for me, that will put me in an impossible position.' We understood that first, best and most clearly in the Alice Springs Hospital when talking to the Aboriginal Engagement and Strategy Unit.

We then spoke to the palliative care team. The Alice Springs Hospital, with involvement of Dr Christine Sanderson, who is a specialist doctor in palliative care there, had already provided us a detailed submission which was important to look at. We discussed that further in person, which gave it more light.

One of the key things we took away was the importance of where VAD happens. The Alice Springs Hospital palliative care team made clear how hard they worked to make sure that there is trust in that hospital and that people in the wider Alice Springs catchment area treat it as a place of healing, not a place to die. We want to make sure that is maintained.

For purveyors of healthcare in Alice Springs, including the palliative care team, it was important for them that if and when there are VAD services they do not have to take place only within a hospital setting. We wrestled with the idea of whether to suggest that they should never take place within a hospital setting. The wisdom of the Health department, through the testimony provided in public hearings, was, 'Do not stop us from being able to do that, but it is important that we have other spaces'.

In a perfect world, people could have VAD services in the comfort of their home or perhaps back in their communities surrounded by their family and loved ones, back on country. There will be instances when people are too sick to leave hospital, and it will need to be done in a hospital. There will be instances when we need safe third-party places. We cannot build entire new VAD facilities, but we must provide for neutral spaces for people to access that level of service.

It is a shame and deficiency of our inquiry that we were unable to get to Nhulunbuy and Gove, where we know there is a good set-up of palliative care existing next to a hospital with access for family and community to be proximate. The Health department and government may want to look at that in terms of a best-practice model for providing palliative and aged care in remote and Indigenous settings.

Returning to the Alice Springs Hospital care team, we learned not only about the 'where' but also about the importance of cultural safety and about group decision-making and practice from the perspective of the practitioners, not just the perspective of people in community. We learned about palliative care in practice, what people can and cannot do and what the limitations are.

Another critical thing we learned in relation to workforce is that patient care assistants are much maligned in our system. A lot of the time people think they are not quite proper nurses and that they just get tea and biscuits, but they are a lot more than that. In relation to end-of-life care, palliative care and healthcare, they are super important. We explored the fact that more patient care assistants would be extremely valuable for our healthcare system. Why is that important? It is because they are easier to get, cheaper and not entirely ubiquitous, but they are not a precious commodity in the same way as a nurse practitioner is. Patient care assistants can be a part of helping us work on problems within our healthcare system; that is an important finding.

We also learned that it is one thing to have people out bush saying, 'No, I do not want any of that treatment' and another thing to have palliative care teams talk to you properly about people's pain tolerances and thresholds. Do you know what? A lot of people out bush are seriously hard as nails. They say, 'No, I do not want anything. I will die a natural death. I believe I should die.' Whether it is because of cultural reasons or

religious reasons, suffering is a part of the human condition. That is important to hear from a palliative care team.

We then went to the Alice Springs Baptist Church, and I encourage all members to look at that testimony because it was such a good example of legitimate, reasonable and measured objections to VAD on religious grounds. We had the benefit of hearing from the pastor who made it clear that life is sacrosanct, and he would not ordinarily endorse VAD. However, when we pushed him on the point and asked for him to provide specificity—I quote from page 6 of that testimony on Thursday 21 August at the Alice Springs Baptist Church—Mr Brown said:

As a pastor, my responsibility is to meet people where they are at, so if somebody chose that path I would not necessarily endorse it, but at the same time I would be there with them 100% of the way and help them to discover that God is present within it. I do not think the church would simply remove—or I hope not themselves from that space just because it makes them uncomfortable. The church has a responsibility to meet people where they are at, from my perspective.

There are balanced, nuanced and reasonable objections to VAD from people on a range of grounds, and you will find them if you look at the testimony and go through the witness transcripts.

In that same vein, in Alice Springs we met with a representative of the Australian Christian Lobby. The Australian Christian Lobby is in many regards often maligned, perhaps unfairly so on occasion. I think this testimony is worth looking at in that regard because it offers not only clear-cut opposition to VAD—no doubt about that—but also a considered, reasonable set of conscientious objections on faith-based grounds. In the competing rights and priorities of the healthcare system the witness on that occasion made clear that his priority would be for us to do much more in palliative care rather than to put our efforts into VAD.

We as a committee believe that more should be done in palliative care but also that people should have equitable access to VAD. It is important to understand that we have not just put together a rubberstamp glossy report without hearing what Territorians have to say on this issue. That does not mean that we agreed with everything they had to say, but we tried to weigh all the data and make careful, considered decisions about a reasonable, practicable way forward.

Old Timers Aged Care Service in Alice Springs was a good example of two-way learning. We were asked a basic question by someone in the audience about what percentage of people support VAD, to which we were slightly flummoxed because we were like, 'We do not know the answer to that question'. We are not here to run a referendum, and it is important that we collectively start figuring out the answer to that question.

The other interesting thing was to have somebody say, 'Why do we have to call it VAD? What is VAD? I do not even know what VAD is. VAD sounds so insensitive. Why can't you properly call it voluntary assisted dying, given the seriousness of it?' That is one of those things that fed into us trying to understand why 'rights of the terminally ill' might be the right nomenclature to use in this regard.

I do not want to take away from the importance, significance, weight and gravity of this discussion, but I point out that VAD (voluntary assisted dying) is still so confusing that we genuinely have on record testimony from an elderly gentleman who turned up thinking that the consultation was about dying wool, not about dying people. He turned up and told us, 'I did not realise. I thought this session was about wool dying. I just want to live as long as possible. Thanks; see you later.'

Nomenclature—words—matter. I am being pithy with the observation but, in all seriousness, words matter. How we describe things and definitions matter. We learned two other important things from that session. That session was attended by ex-Victorian nurses who straightaway asked us all the hard questions, saying 'I was there when this happened in Victoria. I remember being gagged and all the angst surrounding whether or not I was allowed to speak or if could refer anything to anyone, or family members saying, "You are not allowed to have that conversation with my elderly father or mother".' Those questions need to be resolved from the front end.

In our report we have strongly leaned in favour of initiating the conversations. Our report is not a libertarian report, but we have fundamentally tried to prioritise transparency and openness and to allow much of the information that we have collected to see the light of day. To that point, we want for healthcare practitioners, medical practitioners and people adjunct to the healthcare process not to be inhibited from having conversations, even if that conversation says, 'This is not for me. I do not want to be involved.' The minimum expectation is, 'Here is the number of the VAD navigator service. Here is a connection to somebody you can talk to.'

Return to country programs were also discussed in that space. They are important to understand. They are already under the auspices of community health organisations—programs in place to help people who are elderly, infirm and often terminally ill or in the last stages return to country in some form, not necessarily to provision them to pass on country but to at least connect to country. There are existing mechanisms for us to work in parallel with so that we do not reinvent the wheel.

We simply do not have the money to quadruple what we do in patient travel assistance, CareFlight or whatever it might be. We have to be agile about thinking how we can provide equitable access, something like a return to country scheme already exists for us to be part of.

The final of the four major sweeps of areas we covered was the Barkly and Tennant Creek region. In those places we learned extensively about the aged care sector, the significance of moving to ACCHOs, things like self-care dialysis and the viability of it and about pharmacy control of VAD substances. It was a clear example when somebody involved in pharmacy services said, 'We do not think it is a good idea to have these substances in our community for any longer than necessary'. It is important for people to understand that even a decentralised VAD service would require centralised pharmacy services to ensure the safe supply, storage, use and disposal of pharmacological substances.

Beyond the Barkly Regional Council and meeting with the folks there, we looked at yet another aged-care facility, Pulkapulka. That was a great opportunity to talk with a gaggle of nurses and hear their stories and concerns about indemnity from liability if they were to be involved in VAD. They discussed protection for carers, palliative care services as they are provided and visits to country. They provided us with stories of agility in helping people.

In Tennant Creek, in community consultation drop-in sessions we arranged, we learned about disability, dementia and terminal illness from people in disability advocacy. It was important to understand that because we were unable to cover every aspect, nook and cranny of respondent whom we would like to have covered, we have a good representative dataset, and it is not to be underestimated.

It is a lot to suggest that with 300 pages of reporting, an appendix and drafting instructions, one should still refer to the source materials. The fact is that the real meat and potatoes is in the source materials—the witness transcripts from out bush and the 400-plus written submissions provided by Territorians from all over.

We had further consultations in Tennant Creek with the Cattlemen's Association and individual Tennant Creek people. Some of those transcripts are still not publicly available. That is unfortunate and imperfect, but it is the result of us having done this on a compressed timeline.

I commend the people who helped us to output this work, not just the committee secretariat but parliamentary Hansard staff who worked around the clock to churn out these transcripts for us over and again. This was for us to read, process and publish safely and as expeditiously as possible to ensure that today people can discuss not just the report and finished product but the raw ingredients that inform that finished product and to learn, cite and quote from that.

Nothing is being hidden at any stage. Everything has been as transparent as we could reasonably make it, and our priority has been to progress the VAD agenda. This would not have been possible without the committee secretariat, and I thank them all for their enormous efforts in meeting our timeline.

I thank the five committee members individually—all of whom put in a significant amount of work to make this happen. I am grateful to the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for helping to provision access for us in many Indigenous spaces, for being a willing participant in the conversations and for the robust discussions we could keep within the confines of meeting spaces. In a similar vein I am grateful to the Member for Nightcliff whose world view and mine do not align in many regards, but who was diligent in trying to prosecute her case, have a contest of ideas and hold her ground but also cooperate with us as a multi-party committee to produce a unanimous report.

Above all I owe a debt of gratitude to my two government colleagues on the committee, the Members for Wanguri and Blain. I single them out not least because they were there for all of it—the hundreds of hours. Even I as the Chair of the committee must confess that I missed two of the sessions due to illness. They were there for all of it—every meeting, consultation and every hour of every minute of all the hearings. They took the time, as with the others, to get across all the materials as best they could and demonstrated, as is evident through our minutes, inquiry testimony and witness transcripts, they were prosecuting the agendas, asking the hard questions and trying to dig deep and get answers. I am enormously grateful to them for their time in that regard and separately to the Member for Blain as the Deputy Chair of the committee for deputising

for me on the occasions when I was unavailable. It is not easy to get thrown in the deep end on something like this when you are suddenly the one tasked with trying to build a bridge in a foreign place on a complicated topic that nobody actually wants to talk about. I thank the Member for Blain for his sincere effort in that regard.

I reserve my final thanks to those who have generously shared their time and stories with us from across the Territory. It is not an easy thing to talk about the death of a loved one at any time, even when it is an historical issue. It is not an easy matter to discuss the harsh realities of palliative care and end of life. People did not have to speak with us. There was a better-than-even chance that we would arrive at a lot of destinations with limited notice and suddenly find ourselves eating sandwiches, sitting on the red dirt with no-one to talk to, and that never happened. Everywhere we went people came to talk to us. The secretariat was extremely diligent in setting up people for us to get started with and then—by a culmination of luck, design, cooperation, collegiality and commitment to the cause—word got out that we were available to have a yarn with people if they were interested in having a yarn with us, and we managed to capture huge amounts of testimony in the time we had available to us.

No research process, consultation or inquiry is ever perfect, and I freely admit on behalf of the committee for the sake of the committee taking ownership of the issue that this inquiry was replete with imperfections, but for all its imperfections we have produced a report of high quality. We have a large catalogue of evidence which people can, at their time and discretion, interrogate to understand the totality of what we have learned on VAD. I believe we have satisfied the core goal that was always at the forefront of my mind, which was not to decide on VAD but to provide progress on the issue of voluntary assisted dying for Territorians.

I have, as everyone is aware, erred on the side of completeness to cover the field. I have done so advisedly, but I am grateful for the indulgence of my government colleagues and, likewise, to the opposition and members of the crossbench who have been willing to afford me as the Chair of this committee the opportunity to make a substantive tabling statement. I have done so because I believe that this is an important issue that Territorians have been waiting 30 years for real progress on. Finally, together collectively, we have the opportunity to present that we as a parliament can move forward on this issue for the benefit of all Territorians.

As Chair, I thank all the people who participated in the inquiry in any form. I am extraordinarily grateful to my committee members and, likewise, to the secretariat, Hansard and parliamentary staff, all of whom have been instrumental in making it possible for us to achieve a result.

My final plea in my capacity as the Chair of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee and my duty, as I see it, is to ask the Assembly in earnest and to implore the government of the day and, for that matter, the opposition, to work collectively to ensure that the Bill we hope will come to this House in due course will reflect this final report and these drafting instructions with consideration for the report recommendations.

On that note, I move that the report be noted.

K McNAMARA (Nightcliff): Mr Deputy Speaker, I took part in the inquiry into voluntary assisted dying as a member of the Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee.

I start by thanking every person and organisation that contributed to this inquiry through submissions and attending hearings. The submissions we received and the verbal testimony we heard, regardless of their stance on voluntary assisted dying, were heartfelt, passionate and considered.

The contributions were informed by people's personal experiences, expertise, spirituality, culture and personal philosophies. It is vital for the varied experiences and opinions of the public on weighty topics such as this to be heard by those who make policy. I hope all those who contributed feel proud to have participated in this democratic process and know that their voices have shaped the recommendations before us.

I am grateful to have heard so many of these contributions firsthand and feel humbled by the trust and generosity that so many people demonstrated in sharing their stories with us. Some shared experiences of unbearable suffering; others shared their fears about what voluntary assisted dying might mean for their communities; and others shared their deeply held spiritual and cultural beliefs about death and dying. Every contribution mattered.

I also thank all of my constituents who have spoken and written to me about this issue. To the best of my knowledge all of those I have heard from have said that they are supportive of VAD legislation.

I heard many times before this inquiry commenced and many more times during it that the NT has waited far too long to regain the rights we originally had for people to have choice about a dignified death. It has been



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

COMMUNITY FESTIVALS, THEATRE,
AWARDS & EVENTS

TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Labor promised increased caps on property prices for its low-deposit home loan scheme for every state and territory except the Northern Territory.

In the new suburb of Asche a four-bedroom house-and-land package costs \$695,000. Labor's new scheme locks out Territorians. Where were the Members for Solomon and Lingiari standing up for us? If the Member for Solomon was as obsessed with home ownership as he was with Aldi the federal government would match our government's commitment to home ownership by ensuring federal schemes reflect the reality we face in the Territory.

A benefit of more Territorians building and owning their home is an increase in the availability of rentals. When a young couple moves out of a rental property and into their own home it adds to the housing supply and frees up a rental. More housing supply drives down the cost of rents—unlike what the Member for Johnston said today. Extending this scheme supports first homeowners and renters alike.

I will speak about a great local business. Earlier in the year I went to the suburb of Asche for a 'try a trade' day hosted by local Larrakia development group AKJ Services. Owners Jess and Antal have five young children. Speaking to the developers this morning I learned that 137 blocks have been sold in stages 1 to 4, which is fantastic. There are only 35 blocks left in stage 5, with estimations they will be sold by early December.

A lot of people in the Asche development potentially would have taken up the first homebuyers' scheme that we have been supporting. Last October the CLP took real action so that thousands of Territorians, no matter when they live, have the chance to own their home.

Casuarina Park stage 3 has started in Katherine. Twenty-eight people took up the \$10,000 First Home Owner Grant for an established house while only one accessed the \$50,000 First Home Owner Grant. Hopefully, by extending the \$50,000 grant for the next year more people will take it up.

There was a conversation about social and affordable housing and what we were or were not doing in that space. The \$50m Social Housing Accelerator Payment funded by the Australian Government is being delivered by the NT Government.

Eight homes are being built in Katherine: five on Bradshaw Crescent; one on Casuarina Street; and two on Maluka Road. These works engage local contractors, including Greenspace Group Pty Ltd, LA Build Pty Ltd, DICE Australia Pty Ltd and Katherine Constructions, which is a company run by Pat Hill. Pat has put on an extra apprentice to allow for the extra building work and development, which is a great thing for people in our area. It is great for kids who want to go from school into an apprenticeship. My children all went into apprenticeships and got their trade qualifications, and it is a great pathway for them. The other contractors are Blueprint NT Pty Ltd and Centrebuild Pty Ltd.

There are two of those houses being built in the Top End; eight in Big Rivers; three in the Barkly in Tennant Creek; and three in Central Australia.

I wanted to put that on record because I missed the jump this afternoon.

Our first homeowner scheme is great, particularly the \$50,000 grant. We are not just supporting people getting into their own home; we are also supporting those in social housing. We are not a government that applies a one-size-fits-all approach. We are making sure that we look after all people in the community, whether they are on a low income and need social or affordable housing or are moving into their own homes.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): [By leave, the member spoke in French and self-interpreted in English.]

Mr Deputy Speaker, on 6 September I had the privilege to badly speak French and represent the Chief Minister at the 40th anniversary of Alliance Francaise and its inaugural French Festival.

I will speak briefly—sketchily—in French today because the next time we have a mission like this we should probably send the Member for Drysdale, whose daughters speak much better French than I do. However, I am pleased to report that there were no diplomatic incidents on this occasion.

We were blessed with the presence of His Excellency Mr Pierre-Andre Imbert, the Ambassador of France to Australia. It was a wonderful atmosphere with amazing food and beverages—such as duck confit sliders, of which I ate far too many—quality entertainment, beautiful face painting, baguette-based comedy, the Zilwa Band and DJ Mathilde. I must thank Clement and Ingrid Bresson and their delightful young son, Emile, who kept me entertained all night. It was a fantastic event.

French-speaking people have been in the Northern Territory for a long time. Some of them come from places we would not necessarily think of straightaway such as Mauritius, Morocco, Senegal and Quebec in Canada. It was, overall, a stupendous event.

[French spoken.]

Moving from French to Italian, it was likewise a great privilege to represent the Chief Minister at Brown's Mart on 1 October to witness the premiere of Lisa Pellegrino's *We Keep Everything*. This beautiful production shared the Pellegrino family story. Some of you will know Lisa as a former media personality here, and her sister is also something of a chanteuse who is seen all over the place.

Migrant stories are not heard as often as I wish they were when I was growing up here. To have something like that production was a significant contribution not only to art but also to social cohesion.

It was a special evening to be a part of. It was a great crowd of eminent Territorians and patrons of the arts and theatre. I was privileged to be there amongst them all. It takes a lot of courage to put yourself out there and share your story, let alone in a one-person production—a one-woman show—and I was chuffed to be there.

It also takes courage to engage in lifelong learning and professional development. I was pleased to be at the First Circles Leadership Program graduation at the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network, accompanied by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the minister for Education, the Opposition Leader and the Member for Blain. I am committed to professional development and the process of trying to keep learning throughout your life. It is important that we celebrate these Indigenous leaders. Our Territory needs more leaders. If anyone has not seen the event brochure they should because it is a great little read to find out about people who graduated from the last program and all the things they are involved in.

To Stacey Davis, Veronica Peters, Terrence Wilson, Selma Smiler, Casey Smiler, Simone Baker, Zelda Dhamarrandji, Patricia Puruntatameri, Lateesha Coombes, Kevin Dumoo and Corben Mudjandi, congratulations on graduating that night. It was a wonderful event. A special mention goes to Corben for his killer maroon jacket. That guy knows how to dress; he was best dressed on the night. Thank you to NTIBN for the deadly music, warm hospitality and the delicious buffet, which I destroyed.

The following day we were privileged to celebrate health workers at the NT Mental Health Week Awards held at Parliament House. The Minister for Health; the assistant minister for Health, Mr Deputy Speaker; the Member for Fannie Bay; the new Lord Mayor; and, most importantly, advocates and practitioners for good mental health were there. It was wonderful to collectively recognise our shared commitment to good mental health.

I give a shout-out to Geoff Radford, head of the Mental Health Coalition, for his stewardship and advocacy in this space. Geoff is a constituent of mine in Woolner. From the first time that I met him on my doorstep, he has always been banging down my door to prosecute the case for better mental health, providing data, literature and information. I greatly appreciate his indefatigable commitment to mental health.

It would be remiss of me not to mention my colleagues, the Members for Fannie Bay and Port Darwin, who did the lion's share of the work in organising our Darwin community movie night. Everybody enjoyed watching *Garfield* in the George Brown Darwin Botanic Gardens and we raised a tidy sum of money for the Starlight Foundation. There was great attendance, great family fun and some footy; I managed to kick a football and not stack it, which was encouraging. The Waratahs people were nice to me about that. I was delighted to be a part of it, so thanks to my colleagues in that regard.

Over the last year my community has very much become Dinah Beach. That is where the good people who I spend my time with increasingly are, particularly on a Wednesday night for chicken wings, as you all know. I was honoured to be there on 5 October to be re-elected the patron of Dinah Beach for another year. We used the opportunity and the rent-a-crowd that we got post AGM to put on—in the spirit of old-time Darwin—a bit of sunset jazz. It was fun to do a gig out there again.

As many of you may recall, Fong Lim has lots of Defence and Defence-adjunct precincts such as Eaton, Coonawarra, Winnellie, Berrimah and Wishart. It is nice to have a connection with Defence. Throughout the year I have been working with the Royal Australian Navy, which has been setting up a band and a new ensemble, and it has been wonderful to gig with them. When they are not in white uniforms they are called the Noteheads. It was the patron and the Noteheads doing sunset jazz which was tonnes of fun. I look forward to doing several more performances with them in the lead-up to Christmas at Dinah Beach and beyond for anybody who wants to hear my best impersonation of Michael Buble.

Speaking of great things at Dinah Beach, it would be remiss not to mention duck laksa. This year I took a photo of duck laksa and put it on social media. It smashed all my engagement records, which is testament to the fact that food is a great binding force for all of us. I encourage all parliamentarians—for those of you who somehow have not already had a laksa—to get out there and get some laksa into you this October. Check out darwinlaksafestival.com.au if you have not already because it has a lot of fascinating information—as well as the league tables—and it is great to learn about all the bits and pieces of the laksa lifestyle. The Territory lifestyle is laksa lifestyle; it is synonymous with laksa, and we all know that.

If you read the site you would note that laksa itself is a lovechild of a dish. It represents fusion and the melting pot; it is an expression of multiculturalism for us. We do a lot of things in here, and I just hope that we can all invest in diversity, multiculturalism and the community here—food and beyond. All the best things are done when you break bread together, I find. I encourage all parliamentarians to snap up a laksa while you still can.

On Friday night I was slightly in the wrong place—in the sense that I happened to miss all my colleagues at the Chief Minister's Awards—but I was somewhere worthwhile. I was at the Palmerston Recreation Centre, where the Darwin Symphony Orchestra has been doing a concert—last year and this year—with a view to bringing music to the people. That is important. There was a great crowd and beautiful music, and the markets were on in the background.

We were lucky that night to have the first conducting performance by the new Artistic Director of the Darwin Symphony Orchestra, Richard Mills AO. For anyone who does not know who he is, he is a big dog. He is a serious heavyweight in Australian music; he was the head of Opera Australia for a period, and it is a real coup for the Northern Territory that he came up here and is conducting the orchestra. It was a great privilege to see him conduct the orchestra, communicate with everyone and teach everybody about what they were doing. There was tonnes to learn.

The orchestra did wonderful bits of Bizet. It was a great program featuring, I might add, Aya Smith who did great solo work. It is extremely rousing to hear the *Superman* theme—John Williams' music—played live for you. If you ever get the opportunity, try to check it out because it is fantastic. As I have said before, the Darwin Symphony Orchestra is not some elitist bourgeois nonsense. Sometimes it plays arty music, but it is a community orchestra and it plays music for the people. I encourage all of you to get out there, grab yourself a laksa and get to the next Darwin Symphony Orchestra concert when you can.

With that, I look forward to Christmas events forthcoming.

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Speaker, on 3 October the Northern Territory lost one of its true tourism pioneers, Werner Sarny. His funeral and celebration of life were today. Many of us who would have liked to be in Katherine for the funeral could not make it due to the Assembly sitting, so I will talk about him this evening.

Werner built a remarkable life here after arriving from Austria in the late 1950s. He made Katherine his home and through hard work, vision and determination helped put the town on the map.

From his early days running tours at Nitmiluk Gorge to building Travel North, the Paraway Motel, Springvale Homestead and the BP service station Werner turned his love for the Territory into a lifetime of contribution. For more than 50 years he welcomed visitors, created jobs and showcased the heart of the Top End. Even after floods and setbacks he never gave up on Katherine.

His dedication to service and community earned him the Tourism Minister's Award for Excellence, the Qantas Award for Outstanding Contribution and in 2000 the Order of Australia.

His daughter Jackie said that he was proud of what he built, grateful to be embraced as a Territorian and deeply committed to his family. That sentiment says it all—Werner Sarny embodied the Territory spirit.

On behalf of the Finocchiaro CLP government I extend condolences to his daughters, Monica, Natalie and Jackie, and to all who knew and loved him. His legacy lives on in the town he helped shape and in the industry that still benefits from his hard work.

On Saturday 18 October I attended the NT Breast Cancer Voice Pink Morning Tea fundraising event. There was a huge crowd at Cazalys Palmerston. I make special mention of Rachel from Cazalys who did a great job gathering everyone and putting on an amazing display of high tea delicacies. The tables were long and so were the trays of food.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

NORMA FONG LIM

WEDNESDAY 22 OCTOBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I pay my respects to the late Norma Fong Lim and her family. I did not know Norma personally, but I feel duty-bound, as the current custodian of the Fong Lim electorate, to acknowledge her passing, not least as a beneficiary of her legacy.

In my maiden speech I reflected on the fact that Fong Lim is, by NT standards, a relatively new electorate, having been created in 2008 as a composite of inner original Darwin suburbs and newer northern suburbs. It is named, as I frequently mention when I travel, after Alec Fong Lim AM, the first Chinese-Australian Lord Mayor. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 1986 for his services to the community and local government. I reiterate that I am deeply honoured to represent a constituency named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the embodiment of Australia's most successful multicultural community. I proudly bare my father's name, alongside my eponymous electorate, knowing how much I owe them both. I extend those remarks to envelope Norma, knowing the extent to which she has been a pillar for the entire Fong Lim family, especially her husband as Lord Mayor.

Norma was 27 years old when she met the charming and handsome Alec Fong Lim in Darwin on his way back from overseas, where I believe he was on a junket to find himself a wife. Having returned unsuccessfully, he instead managed to snag himself a date with Norma and proposed after a whirlwind romance of six weeks. I am told she was saved from being left on the shelf, but I am not sure who saved who, based on the notes that I have.

Norma and Alec lived a full life together, having six beautiful intelligent daughters of whom we know about in different contexts. Norma valued teaching the girls to be strong, independent women and was clearly proud of them all. As a wife, Norma supported Alec through all his ventures, including his involvement in the family pubs, business ventures, wholesale groceries, alcohol, dress shops, the fruit juice stall and even his life as a bookie. After many years of practice, with Alec Fong Lim having held many significant posts in the interim, she was likewise serious in her support as lady mayoress and quietly offered sustenance.

She rarely stepped into the spotlight, by many accounts, insisting the spotlight was for Alec in the first instance. Nevertheless, she was still always willing to throw an impromptu dinner party, put on a frock and have dinner at a moment's notice or to offer her arm at functions. I learned that, in her time as lady mayoress, Norma explored her talent as an artist. She loved painting landscapes and fauna and holding exhibitions to sell her artwork. Many people, in this room in fact, have one of Norma's paintings in their office, and there are a few hanging in the chambers on the third floor of Nichols Place.

Her love of painting continued even when her dementia started to take over her life. She attended many paint-and-create sessions and usually put her spin on the subject. It was her own and, therefore, worth recognising in its own right. It was great to see her have something of her own beyond being a mother and wife. She loved colour and appreciated nature, which is evident through all the testimony about her paintings.

I also learned through Tanya's eulogy, which I hope she will not mind me drawing from, that while she supported Alec through his endeavours, particularly as lady mayoress, what is not known is how difficult she found public life a lot of the time. I quote from the eulogy:

While she was immensely proud of Dad, her shy nature made it difficult for her to attend so many social functions smiling nicely and making small talk. But like the queen (after who she got her second name) she did it well.

When Alec passed away, she of course missed him dearly but was also happy to say good riddance to those social events. The exception was when she had the opportunity to go to Government House and meet King Charles, who was then Prince Charles. Her love and focus for family shone through when she asked him, 'Do you get to babysit your grandchildren often?', and he said, 'Oh no; I am not good at that.' She was a family person through and through; it was always at the forefront of her mind.

She was a stoic and humble stay-at-home mum, which probably shone through most after Cyclone Tracy, having to shoulder the burden of looking after the whole family in the wake of tragedy. Luckily, she and her four daughters were visiting her mum in Sydney at the time for Christmas when disaster struck. With Alec away doing cleanup in Darwin, Norma organised schooling for the four youngest daughters and made their lives as normal as possible, despite the devastation that had been brought upon Darwin. She knew that Darwin had been decimated, her brother-in-law had been killed and her eldest daughter and mother-in-law had been saved by police who collected them and took them to safe haven.

She would have been terribly worried about what sort of future would lay ahead, but she proved her mettle by working with Alec to get things up and running interstate and home in Darwin.

Her support for Alec was absolute by all accounts. She was there in good times and in bad, and theirs was a partnership of equals born of real mutual love and respect. She was by his side when he was forced to resign early as Lord Mayor because of ill health and, likewise, by his bedside when he passed just a month later.

To the family first and foremost, I say that I am proud to be associated with the Fong Lim name. That sentiment extends to the late great Norma Fong Lim as well as Alec Fong Lim. Lady mayoress Fong Lim was gracious, charming and kind—words used to describe her by the many people who crossed her paths over the years.

My sincere condolences go to all in the family here tonight and beyond—perhaps online.

Vale, Norma Fong Lim.

Mr CHARLS (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I pay tribute to Mrs Norma Fong Lim, a remarkable Territorian who sadly left us on 5 September 2025 at the age of 96. I acknowledge all the family members who are here with us.

I had the privilege of meeting Norma earlier this year at her 96th birthday celebration at the senior's lunch hosted by the Chung Wah Society. I remember walking in to that room—filled with laughter, family and friends—and seeing Norma surrounded by many people who adored her. When I presented her flowers on behalf of our team, she smiled with that unmistakable mix of grace, humility and quiet strength that so many people have described. Even at 96 she carried a presence that spoke volumes about the Territory's past and the extraordinary life she had lived.

Born Norma Chin Ling Ying in Darwin on 18 February 1929, she was the daughter of Chin See Pon—known affectionately as 'Botany'—and Pauline Chee Quee. Hers was a family deeply woven into the fabric of Northern Territory's Chinese-Australian story; her lineage stretches back to the goldfields, the rail camps and the early days of Palmerston and Pine Creek. Norma's childhood took her from Darwin to Thursday Island and later to Sydney during the war years before she returned to the Territory as a young woman.

In 1955 she married Alexander (Alec) Fong Lim. His grandfather, known as Fong Ding, migrated here in 1890, and Alec's father, Fong Fook Lim—known as George Lim—was born in Fountain Head in the Douglas Daly region in 1902. This family was instrumental in building Darwin's most iconic hospitality landmarks, including the famous Lim's Hotel and Sand Pebbles Restaurant. For those who have not made the connection—only some are old enough to have been to Lim's—this is now the Beachfront Hotel in Rapid Creek.

Alec would go on to become one of the Darwin's most beloved Lord Mayors, elected in 1984 and again in 1988, remembered for his generosity and civic pride. I am also reliably informed that he had a quirky sense of humour. Through it all, Norma was by his side, as a partner, confidant and quiet powerhouse. Those who knew her speak of her kindness, hospitality and artistry. She was a talented watercolourist, accomplished cook across many kitchens and matriarch whose home was always open.

Norma and Alec raised six daughters—Dallas, Michele, Tanya, Katrina, Camille and Lorelei—each of whom went on to succeed in their chosen paths, and together they have carried forward the values of service, resilience and family that Norma embodied.

Camille and I did the Australian Institute of Company Directors course together in 2022, and I have met with her in the last two or three years. I used to see her at many AICD events after that as well.

I was unable to attend Norma's funeral as I was in Sydney for the Multicultural Affairs ministers' meeting, but I thank Lorelei for providing me with the eulogies from the day and the moving letter to her mum. I was struck by many things, but there were a couple of takeaways I will share. She said, 'You showed me that forgiveness is never conditional. You taught me strength and resilience and to never be afraid to be vulnerable.'

The Fong Lim name is now etched into the Territory's history. It stands proudly on our electoral map, with the electorate of Fong Lim named in honour of Alec's legacy as Darwin's first Lord Mayor of Chinese descent. We heard from the Member for Fong Lim about this.

The beautiful road from the gates at East Point to the gun turrets was named Alec Fong Lim Drive after the popular mayor, as was Lake Alexander, due to the work he had done to develop the area and the family history of living on East Point Road.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

TEACHER REGISTRATION

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

English proficiency, there were many other things we did not cover. These include there being no early childhood specialist registration category; concerns about conditional registration; the risks in lowering qualification standards; the need for flexibility in the transition period; alternative pathways for Aboriginal language and VET teachers; there being no requirement for Aboriginal community consultation; there being no formal Indigenous language proficiency framework; questions about the independence of the board; the need for an implementation plan; and concerns about the rushed consultation overall. These points came directly from people working on the ground, and we owe it to them to take their views seriously.

One issue raised by several witnesses was the need for flexibility in the 12-month transitional exemption period. Some witnesses said that would not be an issue for them, but they understood it may be for others. What works in an urban school does not always work in a remote one. Many teachers in remote communities rely on bridging or equivalency pathways, and for some of them 12 months will not be long enough. People suggested a targeted extension option used only when needed so that we could support those teachers without slowing down the reform for everyone else.

Another issue raised was the lack of a formal framework for assessing Aboriginal language proficiency. This Bill recognises Aboriginal languages as specialist subjects, which is welcome; however, recognition is not enough if there is no clear pathway for Aboriginal language educators to become registered. We do not have a Territory-wide culturally informed accreditation process. The department recognised this when it gave evidence. Stakeholders who gave evidence supported creating one. A formal framework for assessing Aboriginal language proficiency is essential for bilingual education, creating local employment pathways and protecting Aboriginal languages and culture. It is crucial work.

We also heard from many stakeholders that consultation was too rushed. If we want these reforms to work effectively in all communities, including remote and Aboriginal communities, we need to involve them properly in the Bill's design. Hopefully, that will happen as part of the implementation and rollout of this legislation.

Most of the witnesses raised concerns about the independence of the Teacher Registration Board and the director, given that the director is employed and performance managed by the CEO of the department, the largest employer of teachers in the Territory. Things may be working well now—we talked about this during the inquiry—but that does not mean they always will. We need to make sure that independence is protected and visible.

We need more transparent guidelines on how conflicts are managed and how concerns can be raised. That is not a complicated issue; it is good governance.

Some stakeholders told us that they struggled to participate in the inquiry because the consultation period was too short. We heard about this in the Chamber already. It is great that this Bill was referred to the scrutiny committee. It is the committee's job to hear from people to inform the Assembly about how a Bill may work. It is important for all of us that we have the proper scope to do that well. It is something to serve us, not undermine our work.

Despite these concerns, I support this Bill. These are necessary reforms and they will work to modernise our teacher registration framework. However, the issues raised in my additional report and by people who gave us evidence should not be left behind now that we are passing the Bill. They are practical, reasonable issues that are grounded in real experience. At the end of the day teachers are at the heart of our education system and we need to make sure that the reforms we make will support them as strongly and well as possible. I trust that when this Bill passes and is implemented that the government will take all these matters seriously as that implementation gets underway.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, the focus areas of this legislation are child safety, regulatory integrity, efficiencies and alignment with national frameworks. Some of those matters are set to be addressed upon commencement. Other matters will be delayed, like clauses 29 to 38. My colleague the Member for Fannie Bay already neatly summarised a lot of the strengths of the legislation. The Part 2 matters that will come into effect after assent—information sharing, strengthening integrity and national consistency—are broadly agreed upon by everyone as a good step forward. The Part 3—clauses 29 to 38—measures for mandatory registration for early childhood teachers, likewise, are agreed upon as useful, albeit matters that will be addressed in a year or so from now.

I am grateful to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee for its work. I read the majority report and the two additional—as the Member for Johnston would have it—reports. It is great that there was an expansion of the scope for looking forward to what we might do in this space to be constructive.

This Bill in isolation is not particularly controversial—there are small things that can be refined, one-percentile improvements and perhaps some five-percentile improvements—but I have chosen to speak tonight because it is important to recognise that this is a piece of the broader puzzle to improve public education and education outcomes in the Northern Territory. At the risk of being contrary on a Bill where there is broad consensus that we will support it, I speak not to just extend platitudes and recognise our schools and wonderful educators—wonderful though they might be—but also to have a bit of a stocktake and see where this fits in the broader picture.

The fact is that our public education system is not tracking as well as we would like. We are on the verge of significant changes. Next year will be a major year in education reform. It is important for us to put these matters in context to understand where we are at and where we go from here. This government is trying hard to strengthen the teacher workforce. It is committed to attracting and keeping teachers through all the work it is doing, fixing education and directly getting kids back in school.

Honestly speaking, all the gnashing of teeth about the one percentile stuff that I hear from some about the Bill are no longer of concern to me in the broader equation. I am now more interested in how we start turning around public education. We can keep on saying, 'This one percentile will improve things', but there are broader structural forces that we need to address. We need to have an eye to history in what has been happening in education for the best part of a decade.

Streamlining processes and reducing administrative obstacles are important. The Member for Fannie Bay outlined how some of that will happen, with the strengthening of regulatory integrity, mandating registration of early childhood educators, creating national consistency and improving information sharing, all of which I applaud. I am all for doing things that bring us into accord with the national standard.

Child safety will be strengthened by mandating professional registration for qualified teachers and improving information sharing with other jurisdictions. That will prevent harm in the long run.

The Bill will strengthen regulatory integrity by tightening things to do with the TRB (Teacher Registration Board), albeit there are concerns about the centralisation of power and decision-making. Here is a reality check for everyone: the centralisation of power is happening the world over and in parliaments across Australia in actual fact. To some extent I am now less about fighting it the whole time and am starting to think that if we are centralising power and mechanisms, how do we still ensure we get good outcomes or, quite frankly, better outcomes than we have been getting?

We have tried a number of mechanisms to create all of the rigour in the world. I am not just concerned with respect to failing our educators, as it was put by one of my colleagues, or the one-teacher, one-profession model; I am thinking more generally about concerns with the education system writ large.

Alignment with the national Framework for Teacher Registration is a great thing. The amendment in the Bill to ensure Aboriginal languages are captured as specialist subjects is a great matter. The amendment recognises the importance of Aboriginal teachers in the teaching of students in their first language and it supports flexible employment options for remote schools.

There is interaction with flexibility in the labour market for us. In a place of small population and limited options we must start thinking about how we create regulatory efficiency by reducing administrative burden. There is a number of interactions. This is not just a bureaucratic piece about registration and child safety; it is part of the broader ecosystem of understanding where our public education system is at. This Bill will streamline registration processes and thereby create flexibility for employers to seek authority—for example, to employ an unregistered person to teach specialist subjects, which is important in the VET space and for individuals working towards gaining teaching qualifications.

All of that said, the question might be: why is this of such interest to me? It is not because my electorate is replete with schools. My electorate has few schools, but they represent the polarities of our system and illustrate neatly some of the systemic problems we have.

On one end of the spectrum I have Haileybury Rendall School, a high-performance private school with fantastic opportunities for its kids. In addition to delivering highly on the core curriculum, it has all manner of extracurricular options available to people there. It has been my great pleasure to be involved with that school and to do high value-adding tasks there to be part of its community and contribute where possible. The extent of my interaction—or our interaction—with it, to some extent, is about preventing things like the Berrimah Road duplication to ensure that the school is not disrupted.

On the other end of the continuum I have a great investment in public education. I am the product of five public schools in the Northern Territory. The equality of opportunity that I had going through schools historically, like Anula, Karama, Sanderson and Casuarina, gave me a fair go to realise my potential. That was the case for generations past, and I am not convinced it is the case for generations going forward and there is ample evidence to suggest that.

This is why we have to be making these kind of moves in these kinds of spaces to try to think in a more agile way about how we attract and retain teachers. How do we integrate better with our labour market? How do we deliver for not just educators but also kids? The numbers do not make for great reading based on 15 months of what this government has been doing and the last 10 years of governance in this place. In that regard I have to be honest that I am getting frustrated with the platitudes treating the Labor government of the past as though it had a monopoly on being able to provide solid educational outcomes. In fact the parlous state of the public education system is a product of the last eight years of Labor governance. It is time to start facing up to that reality.

Stuart Park Primary School is one of my schools. It is an excellent school that is regarded—I say this tongue in cheek and slightly in jest but also semi-seriously—as something of a Labor fortress. That school has been socially progressive in many ways. It is wonderfully led by Maria Albion. The school has invested in continuous professional development. It is a place of significant longstanding with experienced and dedicated staff, stable enrolment numbers and consistent attendance in advance of 90%. It even has a great school band which I very much look forward to playing with tomorrow at the music assembly. The fact is that it is increasingly an aberration in our public schooling system.

When you look at the numbers and the metrics you start to realise just how much damage has been done to our public education system and why there is growth in independent and private schools. I am not anti-private schools; arguably I represent the elite private school in the Northern Territory, Haileybury Rendall School. It is a fantastic school with fantastic opportunities. It is well run. The other day it had surplus capacity to take Year 9 students for wellbeing week to clean up trash in Charles Darwin National Park. That is a great activity to be part of. It also has fantastic scores in test results across the board. That school is not failing our kids educationally.

It is not just about infrastructure or the registration of teachers; it is about the end result—the outcome—for kids. I do not believe we are facing up to the reality of that situation. Speaking about this today is an opportunity to face that reality as we move forward into the next phase of education reform that has been necessitated by the fact that in the Northern Territory we have dropped the ball on public education over a long time, and certainly over the best part of the last decade.

What are examples of that? At a basic level, I will talk about that primary school I was at. For all its successes, at the beginning of the year it did not have working locks, keys and doors for basic security in its upper primary school. I thank the minister for her responsiveness as it resulted in me being able to resolve these minor capital works. I am grateful for her swift resolution. These are not the kind of issues that schools should have to be wrestling with. Basic infrastructure deficits is the tip of the iceberg.

I read committee members' additional reports which pointed to extra things we could do for teacher registration, but we have a bigger problem that is a function of educational failures by the previous government over the best part of a decade.

The truth is that the numbers speak for themselves. When Labor came to power in 2016 school attendance rates were on the other side of 80%. By the time it had finished two terms of government and was voted out, attendance had fallen to almost 70%. That is a significant metric. We are worried about one-percentile teacher registration stuff and, yes, it matters, but look at the bigger picture of what needs to be done to create the architecture of opportunity in the Northern Territory; otherwise, you are missing the wood for the trees.

After years of inaction by the former Labor government the CLP government is progressing important secondary school reform, which is long overdue. Half of us in this House are beneficiaries of the old education system which provided that architecture of opportunity before we had the middle school rollback. I do not want to hear that we are rushing it, it is too fast and people cannot keep up with it. I do not want to hear people asking how we will implement this. It is already overdue. We will not compromise educational outcomes, but at the same time a lot of this stuff is happening quickly and with a higher risk tolerance because we recognise that this reform is necessary to create opportunity in the Northern Territory. That is the reality. To create opportunity you must invest in the things that work and take chances. So far no great mistakes or missteps have been made, particularly in the education space.

In the last parliament the Member for Katherine presented a petition from 940 people calling for a dedicated special needs school for residents in Palmerston and the rural area. It was not a bad idea then and it is not a bad idea now. I will have plenty to say at budget time about how we spend our money, but that is a good investment. However, it was not a suitable investment for political expediency purposes at the time. Now we are investing in something that makes sense in that regard.

I do not even want to talk about the intensive support roll, but the numbers speak for themselves. They were clearly used to make attendance figures look better than they were. We are being transparent about those figures. It is important that we face up to what those numbers say. It is pleasing that in Term 3 of 2025 we have seen 300-plus fewer kids on the ISR compared with a year ago, in Term 3 of 2024.

We are increasing accountability mechanisms for parents whose children consistently fail to attend school. Will all the policy levers that we pull work? No. I do not believe they will, but will more of them work than if we sit around twiddling our thumbs? I believe that is the case, which is why I am backing the totality of the package of education reform being driven by the minister.

The CLP government committed \$1.9m to employ school counsellors based in schools. Proportionate to our population we have more public servants than anywhere else. We know that education is one space where it makes the least sense to have a concentration of people in the Mitchell Centre because you need a bunch of people on the ground in schools. School counsellors is an example of a good initiative in that regard.

The worst of it all in my mind is that under Labor Territory kids lagged behind the rest of the country in literacy and numeracy. I do not want to be harsh, but that is why we cannot continue to all dance around those figures and talk about the one percentiles. One-third of all NT students are categorised as needing additional support in literacy and numeracy compared with one in 10 nationally. When the Leader of the Opposition and I went to school here the schools were proportionately, per capita, funded better than anywhere else in the country. We essentially had a public schooling system that was the envy of the rest of the country. We made prudent use of the money that we were gifted by the federal government in our education sector.

This is the great irony. It is true that the former Labor government secured money from the federal government—its fair share of the pie—but what did it do with that to result in the standard of literacy and numeracy falling? Our NAPLAN results under Labor showed 58% of all NT students, including 85% of Indigenous students, did not meet basic literacy and numeracy standards.

That is why we are focused on getting kids back to school, via the \$14m Boosting Literacy and Numeracy plan, including embracing a consistent evidence-based approach centred on explicit teaching. It has not been pulled out of nowhere; it works elsewhere. The data and the evidence was out there. If the former government wanted to do something about that it could have, but it did not. The bottom line is that the days of viewing public education as the remit of Labor are over. I am done with hearing about it. Whilst getting our cut of the national education accord, Labor oversaw the decline of public education in the Northern Territory.

There are innumerable fronts on which I could detail the argument, but one of the most compelling is the aggregate enrolment data in the last eight years of government. In 2016—Labor's first term data—there were 33,300 kids in schools. In 2017 it went up to 34,400; in 2018 it was 34,300; in 2019 it was 34,200; and in 2020 it was 34,500. It stayed roughly consistent, but in real terms that means it was declining. In that period whilst Labor was failing our public education sector, the private sector was having to pick up the slack.

The real telling data is what happened in the second term of the Gunner government. If you look at that period you will see a persistent decline in enrolment numbers. It went from 34,600 in 2021 to 34,400 in the following year, to 33,000, to 32,000 and to 32,500. Why did that happen? It is not proportionate to or commensurate with our population growth; it is to do with falling standards in our public education system overseen by the last Labor government and its failure to manage the money it was given to produce better educational outcomes for our kids.

All of this tinkering and additional reports do not mean anything when there has been a decline in standards, numbers and the architecture of opportunity. That is what I am interested in.

The architecture of opportunity in the Northern Territory since the set-up of this place has comprised public health, housing, infrastructure and education. If you fail on those things you will fail to grow the Territory. I am done with the historic romanticisation and revisionism. Make no mistake, the erosion of that architecture is the product of Labor's poor choices over a decade. It is the reason that there are 17 of us on this side and four left on the other side. That is the reality.

I am not trying to say that the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill will correct all the failures in the education system, let alone all the structural failures created by the Labor government over the last eight years, but it is a step in the right direction. It is one of many that this government will have to take in order to bring that architecture of opportunity back into accord and to bring public education standards up to scratch at the junior and secondary levels.

It is an important time to take these steps because 2026 will be a significant year in education reform, with the long overdue rectification of the middle school transition, the necessary moves in child safety improvements and the strengthening of regulatory integrity.

This government is acting to improve public education, not just dealing in platitudes and feel-good stories and talking about the virtues of education in the abstract or our wonderful teachers. Yes, our teachers are wonderful. My teachers were wonderful and my father is a wonderful teacher, but I am done with hearing the stories about wonderful teachers being the be-all and end-all of our system. There are systemic failures that have made it impossible for our education to succeed. Those systemic and structural failures must be addressed, and I believe this government will do that.

I wrote down this quote because I thought it was a good. In the ministerial report in the last parliamentary sitting, the minister said:

... departments have had to be agile over the last year to set things in place. We have not just talked about it; we acted on it.

That is what it will take. The gnashing of teeth over the one-percentile stuff, whilst virtuous is the enemy of the good at this point, as far as I am concerned.

The prevarication and bureaucratisation of public education in particular but also the education sector writ large is a significant problem in the Northern Territory. We may end up having the same conversation in regard to what Labor did with health or public infrastructure. We can keep talking about it or we can do things about it, and that is what the government is getting on with and actually doing. I support the moves being made by the Minister for Education and Training in this space. We are taking calculated positive chances to move things forward at the pace needed because, quite frankly, we are watching otherwise a slow-motion spiral and public education will not remedy itself. The education sector in general will only get back on its feet if we intervene and stimulate the sector at this point. On that basis, I look forward to continuing the process of righting the wrongs done to public education over the last decade.

I commend this Bill to the Assembly.

Mr EDGINGTON (Aboriginal Affairs): Madam Speaker, I support the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025. The Bill introduces many important reforms that I am confident will have a positive impact on the next generation of Territorians.

As the Member for Barkly and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, I am excited about the amendments that recognise the important of Aboriginal teachers and the teaching of students in language, as well as amendments that will support many flexible employment options for local people in remote schools.

Prior to these amendments, regulation 5(3) of the Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Regulations provides an exemption for a person to teach without meeting English language proficiency requirements if that person is only teaching a foreign language. This government understands that in the Territory's remote communities English is often not the primary language spoken and it therefore does not make sense for English language proficiency to be a barrier to teaching first languages in community. The proposed amendment rewords the legislation to replace the term 'foreign language' with 'language other than English'. This amendment clarifies that Aboriginal languages are included for the purpose of the exemption.

In practice this amendment ensures that Aboriginal teachers who hold deep cultural and linguistic knowledge are not excluded from the classroom simply because English is not their first language. It removes unnecessary barriers to employment in remote schools and strengthens a pipeline of local educators who can teach children in their own language. The impact will be profound. Students will learn in ways that reflect their identity, culture and community, while schools benefit from teachers who bring lived experience and connection. Over time, this reform will help preserve Aboriginal languages, improve educational outcomes and build stronger bridges between communities and the education system.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

MCKINNON INSTITUTE

TUESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

got to Wurrumiyanga there was a community barbecue, and everyone was upbeat and ready to go back to their homes. A couple of houses still need to be reconnected to power.

I thank Jangala Coombes, my cousin-brother, for donating his time and his efforts and community members Austin Wonaeamirri, Brenton Toy, Deanne Rioli and all the Rioli family. Coming over from Milikapiti to Garden Point, most of the roads are still inaccessible, but the community and the police are working in conjunction with the land council and the shire to sort it out. I reckon that within a couple of days they should be able to reach Garden Point. It is a team effort, and I am proud of them. Instead of waiting for external services to come in they are chipping in and using all their equipment—chainsaws, axes and trailers—to get things done and get access to these communities. Well done, guys.

Mr BURGOYNE (Braitling): Madam Speaker, the wonderful Alice Springs Christmas Show was held on Saturday afternoon.

I give a huge thank you to the committee and event staff for putting on an incredible event that was enjoyed by many in our community. To Nicky, Racheal, Andrew, Craig and the entire Alice Springs Show committee, thank you for your efforts.

In the evening there were many stall holders and volunteers. I acknowledge them for their work, especially considering the hot 39-degree afternoon. Well done to:

- Angelique Glasson, who sold tickets all afternoon for the Christmas stocking competition
- Shane Thompson, whose baked goods and Christmas puddings are always in high demand
- Naomi Hunter, who not only sold her incredible clay earrings but also supported the fundraising efforts of Ross Park Primary School which sold wrapping paper and cookbooks
- Amy Sabadin, whose desert flowers added colour and vibrance to everyone who bought them
- Megan Deans, who helped throughout the evening, running around and ensuring everyone was where they needed to be
- the CBBA (Centralian Beef Breeders Association), which had a stall on the evening.

Rural shows, no matter what time of year and which form they take, need community support to survive. It made my day to see so many stall holders put in the effort to be there.

The Member for Namatjira and I, with assistance from the Namatjira office, handed out 500 Zooper Doopers to children and parents alike who were looking for some cold relief.

I thank the event organisers for all their work in ensuring that this much-loved event continues to take place.

I will touch briefly on Movember. I am once again growing a mo to raise awareness for men's health. This year it hits home for my family and I more than ever.

Only two weeks ago we lost my Uncle Greg to brain cancer after a short fight. Uncle Greg, like many men, did not want to make a fuss and did not seek medical attention when early signs that something was wrong occurred. Uncle Greg was a key carer for his mum, my grandmother, who has been suffering from dementia for some years. Through putting everyone else first Uncle Greg ignored his own illness, and it cost him his life.

This year, although a bit of facial hair may not change the world, I am once again glad that I can do my bit to start a conversation and raise funds for men's health so that others can seek help when the early signs that something may be wrong occur. We all need to look out for and support one another with our health.

I thank Minister Cahill, who made a generous contribution to my Movember journey this year. If you are keen to donate to anyone taking part in Movember, go online and search their name on the Movember website, view the incredible moustaches men across Australia are growing to raise funds and awareness for men's health and support this important initiative if you can.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, the McKinnon Institute is Australia's only nonpartisan organisation dedicated to strengthening the performance of our governments and parliaments.

It is best known for the McKinnon Prize, which has been awarded for a number of years. It is notable that the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory was nominated this year in the state and territory category of Leader of the Year, something that received little attention and is worthy of recognition. It is not an insignificant achievement in my opinion.

The other thing the McKinnon Institute is known for is professional development and its Advanced Political Leadership course which seeks to equip politicians with the skill sets and mindsets they need to better serve Australian communities by addressing the big challenges that Australia faces.

Over the last six months I am pleased and proud to report—in fact, it was my great privilege—that I was the beneficiary of a professional development opportunity under the auspices of the McKinnon Institute. It involved learning from a wide range of experts. It was a phenomenal opportunity to be able to learn from practitioners in politics, the media and industry—people at the top of their game. Equally, and more importantly in some ways, there was the opportunity to connect with colleagues from across Australia.

I will share a little about my most recent experience with the McKinnon Institute. On 5 and 6 November I spent time in Canberra in the Australian Parliament, meeting with federal colleagues from across the aisle. It was an invaluable opportunity. All of us in this place are afforded the opportunity to spend some of our electorate allowance on professional development. It is great to see how other parliaments function and to learn how we might better function.

I am grateful to the Member for Nicholls for being kind enough to host me on my stay and to his staff, Mark Skilbeck and Morgan Dyer, for taking such good care of me and helping me to arrange all the logistics and the meetings that I had.

It was an opportunity to do things for the benefit of the Northern Territory in many ways, because connection matters. It was a chance to learn about process, build bridges with others and plant seeds for the future.

I am also grateful to the Members for Parramatta, Cook, Lyons, Fairfax, Flinders and Swan, amongst many others, and the staff of all the aforementioned for helping me to make progress in Canberra.

It was a great opportunity to meet with economists from across the aisle. We face great economic challenges in the Northern Territory, as we all know. To be able to speak with the likes of Steve Hamilton and Jonathon Deans was important.

For those of you who have not done it in person, it is a lot of fun and a learning experience to witness a Question Time in federal parliament. It was extra special to watch our Member for Solomon being mercilessly roasted, quite frankly, by the Member for Cook. It made for entertaining viewing from the gallery, but it raised a serious point about the quality of our federal representation. The Northern Territory has profound economic and social challenges. The likelihood of us resolving any of those things is negligible to zero unless we can not only work with the federal parliament but also have people in the federal parliament who are working for us. Connection matters.

I am grateful for the opportunity that the McKinnon Institute afforded me to spend time looking at the Victorian, New South Wales and federal parliaments. Being in spaces like that means you get to meet mayors and other industry players.

In the short space of time I was there, I met with the Isolated Children's Parents' Association, whose work is important in the Northern Territory in relation to boarding school students and the challenges they face.

Australian Pathology had things on in the federal parliament at the time. It was Prostate Cancer Awareness Month. I am pleased to say that I finally had a PSA test done. At least that is not a problem I have to worry about. The Pharmacy Guild had its annual parliamentary dinner, and I am grateful to Keely Quinn for the opportunity to participate in that.

Canberra, however, was the precursor to the main event I attended on 7 November called Future-Ready Government in the Opera House. That McKinnon scholars' day focused primarily on what artificial intelligence means for future-ready governance and our democracy at this moment.

We are all aware that there are challenges in this space. It is a fast-moving area. Indeed, even today in federal parliament there were Bills introduced relating to artificial intelligence regulation and moving forward constructively.

It was fascinating to learn about the new frontiers of AI from Ashley Llorens, Corporate VP of Microsoft Research; AI in Australian industry from Lee Hickin, the new Executive Director of the Australian National AI Centre; and AI regulatory frameworks from Felix Kartte from the European Commission. Perhaps no-one was more instructive than Professor Anthea Roberts at ANU and the CEO of Dragonfly Thinking, who has made the profound shift from being a gold-star legal scholar to an AI trailblazer. Her new focus is on how people in technology together can help navigate complex challenges, including Australia's slow productivity growth.

Why does this matter to us? It matters because the Northern Territory has complex challenges. Structural economic reform, productivity reform and public sector reform will all need to be addressed in the coming years, and we need tools to do that. Technology drives GDP growth and the pace of change is accelerating. If you think about the printing press, electrification, assembly lines, synthetic fertilisers, the internet and AI, you see that it is an exponential curve of growth.

In a 2025 global study on trust attitudes in the use of AI, Australia is the most worried jurisdiction and the least excited. We are risk-averse and worried about job losses and have little homegrown success and low AI literacy. What we have in Australia are either non-critical users just generating cat memes or critical non-users, people who are putting their heads in the sand.

I confess to being in the latter category despite my previous academic work in this space, so over the forthcoming period I will try to remedy this by diving in the deep end to improve my AI literacy, ideas and output towards augmentation because the goal is to augment, not just automate, processes. I look forward to reporting back to the Assembly on that.

I am already beginning to learn and appreciate that LLMs are not stochastic systems nor vending machines; they do not deliver the same results over and again. If you start to understand context windows, temperature setting, path dependence, prompt engineering, token prediction, epistemic hygiene and agentic systems, you realise that this is the vernacular of productivity reform going into the next century and that these are things we will all have to know about. We have to move away from jobs-apocalypse thinking towards using agentic systems as thought partners.

Why does this matter? It matters because smart teams have a diversity of cognitive thinkers. They allow for multi-lens analysis of challenges, which is what we will need to do.

It is possible there is an AI investment bubble forming that may burst, but equally it is probable that AI and LLM technologies are here to stay, to say nothing of more advanced machine-learning applications. On that basis it is prudent for all of us to lean into rather than out of these systems. It will form part of our education, infrastructure and problem-solving. If we want to do more with less we will have to learn how to employ these new technologies in not just Canberra and the APS space but also the Northern Territory public service.

I am grateful to the McKinnon Institute for the opportunity this year to learn and build bridges, particularly the McKinnon team and Professor Rod Glover, the outgoing CEO, and Professor Anne Tiernan. I encourage all parliamentarians in this room—as they are encouraged elsewhere—to explore the McKinnon Institute and all the resources it offers to improve systems and to help us help ourselves. There is not a lot of professional development for parliamentarians. Almost everybody who participates or engages with the McKinnon tools and processes ends up coming away saying that it was a great opportunity and helped them be a better politician, parliamentarian and problem-solver.

In summary, in a polarised world and uncertain times nothing gives me more hope for Australian democracy than the emergence of the McKinnon Institute and its impact on public policy across the country. I am grateful for its support throughout the course of the year. I look forward to continuing my association with the institute in coming years.

Ms UIBO (Arnhem): Madam Speaker, I place on the record my congratulations to the 2026 Australians of the Year for the Northern Territory which was announced on 3 November.

Congratulations to the 2026 Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Dr Felix Ho ASM from Darwin; the 2026 Senior Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Jenny Duggan from Katherine; the 2026 Young Australian of the Year for the Northern Territory, Jaiden Dickenson from Tennant Creek; and the 2026 Local Hero for the Northern Territory, Ron Green BM, ESM from Katherine.

The four Northern Territory recipients will join those from other states and territories for the national awards to be announced on 25 January 2026. I wish them all the best for their trip to Canberra. I will share the bios



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

CHRISTMAS SEASON MUSICAL EVENTS

WEDNESDAY 26 NOVEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

The awards night was fantastic. I acknowledge volunteer NT committee members Hon Daryl Manzie, Chair; Spencer Harvey, Vice Chair; Lee Upton, Treasurer; Shannon Holborn, Secretary; Hon Joshua Burgoyne; Natasha Fyles; Bronwyn Haack; Belinda Howie; and Brigadier Douglas Pashley. I thank everyone involved for their ongoing commitment to our young people and this exceptional program.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Speaker, tomorrow I will thank people and reflect on the year gone by, but tonight I welcome to Bellamack the Koffee Deck which is a new cafe located between Ebony-Rose Hair Design and the Bell Bar at the corner of Forrest Parade and Chung Wah Terrace.

The Koffee Deck is the vision of Priya, who is a local Palmerston mum and was previously a teacher at Woodroffe Primary School. It is open 7 am till 1 pm Tuesday to Sunday and is fur baby friendly. Everyone in Palmerston and the surrounds, please come by and grab a coffee or drop in on your way to work to support the Koffee Deck; it is amazing.

I thank the Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association Inc which recently had its AGM. Palmerston and Litchfield Seniors Association (PLSA) has been operating since 1997 and was originally established to provide morning tea and minor events for the seniors of Palmerston. Having become incorporated, its scope was expanded to include providing events for seniors of both Palmerston and Litchfield. The association is supported by the City of Palmerston, Litchfield Council and many other sponsors. The PLSA is a fixture of the Palmerston seniors' landscape and hosts regular morning teas in Palmerston and the rural area. It also organises the annual Seniors Fortnight during Seniors Month.

The Palmerston members regularly contribute towards the association's raffles which are well attended and well received.

At the AGM, the patron, Natalie La Pira, continued; thank you, Natalie. The new president for this year is Neville Driver. I thank Marg Lee for her service as President of the PLSA. The vice president is Janette Ashby; secretary, Valerie Wilkie; treasurer, Sheryl Sephton; and public officer, Neville Driver. I make special mention of Neville Driver, who is an efficient organiser, drives a hard bargain and gets the best for the PLSA out of all and sundry.

The general committee members are Glenda Bradbury; Christine Cardow; Geraldine (Gerry) Crowhurst; Maryke Lawton; Helen Lemcke; Gillian Marnell; Barbara Murray; Glenda Reid; Jennifer Segav; and Diane (Di) Spicer.

At the AGM several people were recognised for their distinguished service and given various awards. Gerry Crowhurst received the 10-year service award. Gerry, we thank you for your service and for all you have done for the PLSA.

Recognised with life membership were immediate past president, Marg Lee, who has been a staple of the PLSA and various seniors' groups around Palmerston. Thank you for your service, Marg. Also recognised for life membership were Sheryl Sephton and Janette Ashby. Thank you to everyone involved with the PLSA and the committee for all your hard work.

I honour the Palmerston Cricket Club in the suburb of Woodroffe in my electorate, which recently held its annual general meeting. The 2026 committee has continuity and renewal, with new faces and familiar faces. I am pleased to welcome new committee members Hamish Martin; Tamika O'Brien; Laura Ryan; Dale Edwards; and Justine Edwards. I give a big thank you to the returning members for their continued commitment, Adrian Gallagher; Glen Chatto; Luke McMahon; Daniel Fett; Joel Carter; Briony Gallagher; Sarah Fowler; Brendan Rudd; Anthony Schuppan; and Mel Osborne. I also thank the outgoing committee members for their contributions over the past year.

The president is Adrian Gallagher; vice president, Glen Chatto; treasurer, Luke McMahon; assistant treasurer, Daniel Fett; secretary, Joel Carter; junior coordinator, Briony Gallagher; men's player represent, Hamish Martin; women's player represent, Sarah Fowler; social media manager, Tamika O'Brien; maintenance team, Brendan Rudd, Varinder Kumar and Anthony Schuppan; and general members, Mel Osborne, Laura Ryan, Dale Edwards and Justine Edwards.

Well done to the Palmerston Cricket Club. I look forward to another great season at Woodroffe Oval.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, this time last year I reflected on the festive note of the Treasurer's midyear report and I made a promise that I would turn up here in a Santa suit if I could report on

positive economic metrics, and I wanted to 100% stick to that promise, but, alas, it will have to wait until the new year because the Treasurer has decided to defer that until the new year.

However, it gives me the opportunity to speak about my other great love, which is music. I reflect briefly on the fact that whilst Christmas is a time for all of us to unwind to a large extent, for a lot of performers and entertainers it is a busy time of the year. They are working, sharing and providing the backdrop to Christmas for the rest of us to enjoy the festive season.

For most of us a lot of it starts with the Christmas Pageant, which happened on 15 November and went through the city. It was a wonderful event with a magnificent atmosphere. It was good to see so many people out there and the lighting of the tree. It is a unique and special event. Having a Christmas Pageant when it is that hot and sweaty makes you feel at home—Christmas in the tropics.

That is where it starts for a lot of people, but for me, I must confess, my Christmas season now is starting to become synonymous with the Stuart Park Primary music assembly. It is fast becoming the most important fixture in my musical calendar. It was such a pleasure again today to go and join the junior and the senior school band and play along with the mighty trombone section. We put on a stirring performance of favourites like *Tequila*, *Eye of the Tiger* and *Funky Town* as well as *Jingle Bells* and a range of others. Honestly, I cannot tell you how much joy it brings to me.

Maria Albion runs a fantastic school at Stuart Park Primary. Sylvia Siskamanis also does stellar work. Alastair Marshall runs the choir, and it is a wonderful choir to listen to. I could not have thought of anywhere better to be at lunchtime today. There was a huge mass choir, a beautiful guitar ensemble, a fantastic percussion ensemble and the junior and senior bands. They were ably supported by the Northern Territory Music School, which does not get enough recognition, in my opinion, for all the hard work it does across our schooling system.

To Tim Sinclair, Genevieve Meahan and Natalie Chin, who conducted all those ensembles, well done for all your hard work. It was wonderful. I note that Natalie is retiring at the end of this year. She seems far too young to be retiring, and she will be sorely missed. I know she will still be a fixture of the music scene of the Northern Territory.

As I have said before, Stuart Park is a wonderful school and preschool. My favourite moment of the year, other than the music assembly, was the Preschool Wheel-a-Thon. I love that the school is invested in professional development and has a great and active council, longstanding dedicated staff and consistent numbers. It is a melting pot of a school with a diverse student cohort. The staff of 40-plus people are committed to all the right things—literacy, numeracy and explicit teaching—which is the foundation for them to provide great extracurricular opportunities for the kids, like the music program.

I am delighted to spend a bit of my time still being a music teacher on the side. I can honestly say, hand on heart, to everyone in the Stuart Park Primary School community, thank you so much for sharing your community with me. It has been the joy and the highlight of my current job, without a shadow of a doubt.

Another organisation I am constantly grateful for, which I think all of us should be grateful for, is the Darwin Symphony Orchestra. I mention it regularly because I never want us to forget what an important fixture the orchestra is in our landscape, providing opportunity and helping us to grow a vibrant community.

On 19 November it was lovely to be at the orchestra's 2026 program launch to hear about all the concerts it has coming up next year. There will be about a half dozen of them in March, May, June, August and October through to December, looking at virtuosity and imagination; island songs; the movie hit stuff it does; Shakespeare and symphony, with poetry, loss and love; the Palmerston Classics; the Family Proms; Mozart and more; and music for curious young minds. It is wonderful to see young kids interact with the orchestra, as I saw recently in Palmerston. Towards the end of the year, the orchestra always has a Songs of the Season moment, when the rain comes, the frogs start singing, the voices soar and joy abounds.

If you cannot wait until next year, 6 December is this year's final Darwin Symphony Orchestra concert, *Symphony of the Soul*. It is a farewell full of heart and soul. Tchaikovsky's quote was, 'Without exaggeration, I put my whole soul into this', being his sixth symphony, and that is what the orchestra will play. The concert is also a farewell to artistic director and chief conductor Jonathan Tooby, who has poured his soul into the orchestra for the last seven years. He has done a wonderful service.

I am grateful to the Chair, Claire Kilgariff, for keeping me in the loop with the orchestra, and Dr Richard Mills, who is the new artistic director. It is a great coup that we have secured someone of his stature to be involved with the Darwin Symphony Orchestra. Of course, I wish Jonathan Tooby the best with his future endeavours.

Another taken-for-granted fixture of our calendar is Carols by Candlelight in the Amphitheatre. This year is its 50th anniversary. Think about it: that is a long time it has been running. I encourage you all to go there. It is a wonderful event.

On 7 December there will be a 50-strong choir, 18 soloists and the Band of the 1st Brigade of the Australian Army, plus dozens of volunteers. The Darwin Chorale forms the backbone of that choir and does not get a lot of credit for it, but its members do amazing work. I have been to recent rehearsals at Robertson Barracks and everyone is working hard. It will be a fantastic event. Come for the food, festivity and fun, sing along and watch the fantastic fireworks.

It would be remiss not to mention specifically Nora Lewis, who is now Dr Nora Lewis AM, having been recently awarded an honorary doctorate from Charles Darwin University for all of her services to music, as well as Captain Natalie Dajski, leader of the 1st Brigade band, who is putting in huge amounts of effort making sure it will be a great family fun show for everyone.

Remember it also raises a tonne of money for Variety, so go out there. I think this year it is themed as the Golden Oldies concert. All the people who are on the soloists' register had to be long-term Territorians to get on the roster, so if you want to see some old famous names and faces of Darwin celebrity music, they will all be on stage. I would name drop them all, but I know I would miss a couple. Come out for that.

If you are looking for something a bit different, on 13 December there is the Navy Band, which is growing and we are seeing an expanded presence playing in lots of functions, including in Parliament House where we are seeing it all the time now as well. At my beloved Dinah Beach Cruising Yacht Association (the Dinah Beach Yacht Club) the Patron and the Noteheads are putting on jazz carols. It is an opportunity to kick back and enjoy a tropical Christmas. That will be a great atmosphere as well.

Well done to everybody at Dinah Beach for not just battening down the hatches, but rebuilding the place off the back of the cyclone the other day. There were a few different things to contend with in the aftermath of it, and the carols will be a great opportunity for all of us to celebrate together. I warmly encourage and invite everybody in the House to come along if you fancy some of those famous chicken wings alongside a few Michael Buble Christmas tunes.

If you are looking for something a little more conventional, the Arafura Wind Ensemble every year, close to Christmas, puts on its annual Salvation Army Carols by the Lawn at the church hall on Yanyula Drive and Lee Point Road. It is conducted by the indefatigable Stephen Pevely, who has been on the Darwin music scene forever and a day. He is a phenomenal clarinettist, wonderful conductor and generous individual. It is a great community event.

The band has become a pivotal part of the event's success. Along with the carols, there are always classic Christmas selections performed by the AWE. It is a fun festive gig close to Christmas Day. Those of you who cannot get away somewhere exotic and still want to sing Christmas carols and be surrounded by a bunch of people lighting candles in 35-degree heat and humidity, which will likely extinguish your candle, come along because it will be a fun time and a wonderful place to celebrate Christmas together.

I will not say an exhaustive list of thankyou's. I simply want to say to everybody in this place, my colleagues, the staff, all the people who keep the building operational and the people who I probably appreciate the most, Hansard—who put up with how fast I speak and all the things that I say—thank you so much to everybody for facilitating and enabling the work that we do in this place. To all my colleagues, I honestly wish you all a safe and restful Christmas break. I hope that we all, God willing, have a positive and prosperous year ahead.

Ms BOOTHBY (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I pay special tribute to Mr Ken Simmons who tragically and sadly passed away on Sunday 16 November 2025.

Ken was dear to me. He was in his late seventies. I first met him when I got to know his daughter, Bridget, and her family, Dean and her two boys, Lucas and James. Ken was Bridget's dad and I met them during the campaign before I was elected. Straightaway we got on well and he told me how he used to deliver the phonebooks around the suburbs. He said to me, 'If you ever need any help delivering any of your flyers, let me know', so I took that opportunity. He started to deliver newsletters for me, more than five years ago, for the electorate of Brennan.

He passed away only a couple of weeks ago. It was a sad time. His daughter, Bridget, was by his side the whole time. It all happened quickly.



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

ALCOHOL HARM REDUCTION

THURSDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2025

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory

need action now, not next year. We do not need debate on this topic; we need action. This government promised action, and today I thoroughly support the minister in pushing this through on urgency because I will ensure the people of Drysdale get the action that I promised them.

I have been consistently firm in my electorate on the problem of alcohol. I was the first member of parliament to make a referral to the Liquor Commission, and now seven takeaway liquor stores will go to public inquiry for review. I will add to that by supporting this urgency motion to ensure that we can get banned drinker orders from seven to 28 days today, not next week, month or year. It will happen today, and I stand by that the whole way.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, I will make a couple of points on this matter, given it has been raised. I have already spoken about this process and the circus we go through every time about what needs to be sent to the Legislative Scrutiny Committee, the fact that our system is imperfect, that Labor did not have one and that we have one that does not work quite to its liking. We cannot keep going around on this issue.

I will say a couple of constructive things. Two things can be right at the same time. It is not a secret; I have said that I broadly agree with a lot of the principles that have been raised by the opposition and crossbench, but I am also compelled by what Minister Cahill had to say in this space. The fact is we are not introducing a new and novel policy element. Yes, this matter has come in on urgency, without notice, but we all know what happens over summer in the Northern Territory in relation to alcohol harm.

We have a clear and specific recommendation about moving BDOs from seven to 28 days. We have a body of evidence about what the BDO does. Some of that is contested; there is some indication that the BDO is imperfect and that we could do more in other spaces, and more will be, and is being, done. Minister Edgington, the Alcohol Policy minister, has alluded to that being the case.

Mr Young: Come on, Tanzil; it is about governance.

Madam SPEAKER: Silence!

Dr RAHMAN: I take the interjection from the Member for Daly. I care deeply about governance, process and precedent. This government has set a precedent about how it operates in relation to scrutiny. By and large, I am not disputing what has been said by the opposition and crossbench; we use urgency powers when we feel they are necessary, and we have used them more than other people have for a while. So far, it has done more good than harm; it has done no tangible harm.

In my perfect world—as I made it clear to the Member for Daly when we attended the legislative scrutiny conference—it would be better for us to introduce more robust governance mechanisms and standards for processes across a range of matters. However, this is not the issue to die on a hill for in relation to that principle; sometimes you cannot let the perfect be the enemy of the good.

The Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence made a compelling case. We are not afraid to make the tough decisions. On this issue, yes, it has become clear to us late in the year that there is an opportunity to do some good by making this change rather than waiting another three months when we know that, actually, we would have missed the boat on doing anything useful over the summer period. That is the reality.

I am not getting up here to just pound on the opposition and the crossbench and say, ‘What you are saying is nonsense’. It is not nonsense; there is some merit to what you are saying, but equally have a mind to the fact that the government has thought this through as well. There is logic and reason to this.

I do not know about the remainder of the recommendations. I know that more things can be done in the alcohol harm reduction space, but I am also mindful that I am not the minister. The minister has made a calculation based on what we know from a long period of using the Banned Drinker Register. The register has broad bipartisan support. People have knocked it at various times, but generally speaking, this government is—as the former government did—still using the BDR to try to minimise harm and mitigate damage in the alcohol and DV space. Two things can be right at the same time, which is what I think is happening today.

As a matter of high principle there is a lot to be said for the fact that we could do better on scrutiny processes and the mechanisms of this parliament; there is no doubt about that. However, we have a reasonable body of controlled evidence that suggests the BDO, when we use it, does good and that if we extended it from seven to 28 days, it would do more good. Over the Christmas period when, quite frankly, we know there has

been carnage with alcohol-related violence and DV, it would be a useful arrow to add to the quiver of the archer.

I think it is worth us getting behind this and not fighting this matter on principle. If you want to fight for the principle, fight for it separately. We cannot keep having the same argument every time we want to send something to a scrutiny committee. If you want to change the mechanism, bring something to the table, move a motion—move something in GBD when we can talk about that as a specific issue—but on this issue the Minister for Prevention of Domestic Violence and the Minister for Alcohol Policy are right, and I support us moving this on urgency for that reason.

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

The Assembly divided:

Ayes 7	Noes 16
Mr Brown	Ms Boothby
J Davis	Mr Burgoyne
Mr Guyula	Ms Cahill
K McNamara	Mrs Carlson
Mr Paech	Mr Charls
Ms Uiibo	Mr Edgington
Mr Young	Mrs Finocchiaro
	Mrs Hersey
	Mr Howe
	Mr Kerle
	Mr Mackay
	Mr Maley
	Mr Patel
	Dr Rahman
	Mr Yan
	Mrs Zio

Amendment not agreed to.

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

Motion agreed to.

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the second reading of the Bill be made an order of the day for a later hour, having precedence over Government Business Order of the Day number 1.

Motion agreed to.

**TRADE, BUSINESS AND ASIAN RELATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT
(STREAMLINING LICENSING SCHEMES AND OTHER MATTERS) BILL
Serial 47**

Ms CAHILL (Trade, Business and Asian Relations): Madam Speaker, I present a Bill entitled the Trade, Business and Asian Relations Legislation Amendment (Streamlining Licensing Schemes and Other Matters) Bill 2025, and I table the explanatory statement.

I move that the Bill be read a first time.

The purpose of the Trade, Business and Asian Relations Legislation Amendment (Streamlining Licensing Schemes and Other Matters) Bill 2025—hereinafter, the Bill—is to make minor amendments to various Northern Territory legislation under the administration of the Department of Trade, Business and Asian Relations.

The Bill removes unnecessary regulatory and administrative burdens for individuals and businesses who carry out occupations or trades, as well as associations. The range of occupations and industries that will benefit include real estate, commercial and private agents; pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers; plumbers and drainers; and security officers.



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COMPLEMENTARY PATHWAYS
MIGRATION

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The Territory population is estimated to have grown by 1.4% to 264,377 persons in 2024–25, above the 0.7% forecast in the 2025–26 budget. This is because under this CLP government people want to live, work and invest in the Territory again. We have seen stronger net overseas migration and stronger net interstate migration expectations relative to the 2025–26 budget.

Population growth is also expected to be stronger in 2025–26. The Territory's population growth is forecast to be 1.1% in 2025–26, slightly higher than the 1% forecast in the 2025–26 budget. Again, it is supported by stronger net overseas migration expectations. Over the forward estimates population growth is expected to average 1.2% per annum as the Territory's migration flows stabilise. This is in line with the 2025–26 budget.

Overall, the 2025–26 Mid-Year Report shows an economy that is strengthening, a population that is growing and net debt that is decelerating under this government's responsible fiscal leadership.

I commend the 2025–26 Mid-Year Report to the Assembly.

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT AusMusic T-Shirt Day

Madam SPEAKER: Given that it is AusMusic T-Shirt Day, I will allow members to put on a T-shirt this evening if they feel the need to—as the Member for Nightcliff has.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr EDGINGTON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, of all the events I have attended in Parliament House, none has brought me greater joy than the event that was held here last Tuesday, which commemorated the 50th anniversary of the arrival of the first East Timorese refugees to Darwin.

It is a salient reminder of the value of humanitarian migration and its contribution towards the NT historically and ongoing. I say ongoing because one of the people I bumped into there was Maria Albion, who is the Principal at Stuart Park Primary School, whom I have mentioned on a number of occasions. She told me that night something I did not know: she was amongst those first cohort of refugees in 1975 who came here from East Timor.

In the spirit of this being our final sitting day, tonight I share a related story of hope for everybody in this Chamber and for all of us this Christmas. Before I came to this place I was an academic, as many of you know. My area of expertise was competitiveness in the global market of skilled migrants. I returned to Darwin a couple of years ago to try to put some of my subject matter expertise to good use.

I did not return to become a politician; I returned to be a senior public servant, and my remit was to lead and focus the Northern Territory Government's strategy on migration, population and talent acquisition because we are experiencing demographic decline, albeit encouragingly, our population growth figures are starting to stabilise.

The reason that has been happening for a number of years, and the argument that I prosecuted, was that we have been competing—valiantly but potentially in vain—against a global market we cannot compete with. Noting also that Australia itself is not necessarily winning in the global race for talent, we are also competing against other states and territories in Australia for immigrant labour, and historically the problem has been that we were unable to be more attractive than a lot of other states and territories on a level playing field.

In order to fill our sink faster than it drains, as it were—that is, achieve substantive population growth—I argued that we need to find ways to slow the rate of drainage and evaporation with social and economic policy levers, if you like, and to fill our sink using new hoses, finding new inputs to fill into the system.

I had a small amount of success in trying to address those matters between August 2023 and 2024 and worked under the auspices of a population policy working group in the public service. For the first time in the Northern Territory's history, we introduced population policy into the administrative orders under the auspices of the Chief Minister, recognising it was something that needed to be dealt with.

Most importantly of all was the work I progressed under the auspices of the federal government on something called complementary pathways migration. That is really what I want to speak about tonight.

Complementary pathways migration was first countenanced by the Global Compact on Refugees, the 2018 UN agreement designed to improve the worldwide response towards the needs of refugees. There are 33 million refugees in the world, and less than 0.5% of those refugees are resettled using existing mechanisms.

In April 2022 a global taskforce was established to expand these complementary pathways mechanisms, with representatives from UNHCR, the international migration organisation; Fragomen, the world's largest global law firm dealing exclusively with immigration; the governments of Canada, the UK, Germany and Australia; and NGOs connected to humanitarian labour pools.

It put together a model which enabled skilled people, who just happened to be refugees, to take up fast-tracked permanent migration quickly and legally, recognising them for their talent and easing tough labour market access by harnessing private sector involvement for administration.

In the Australian context an NGO called Talent Beyond Boundaries is the key organisation that helps to work on complementary pathways. In conjunction with the federal government, it came up with the Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement, which has been hiding in plain sight for years.

In a short space of time we used it to create a competitive advantage for the Northern Territory to stimulate population growth. We brokered an arrangement to job match and bring 100 skilled workers and their families permanently to the Northern Territory to help us with our workforce needs. This is not some humanitarian sidebar; this is a global program that some of the biggest players in the corporate world utilise. Massive companies use it across the world. For example, it is how the NHS in the UK has been procuring nurses.

In Darwin we were trying to get 100 workers to create momentum towards critical mass because we recognised that we needed momentum in the capital city first before moving on to other places like Alice Springs. We did outreach with the private sector and proponents, including INPEX in the gas industry and Arafura Nolans in the mining industry, which we hear about all the time.

Our first goal was to work with healthcare. In late 2023 we had the first tranche of healthcare workers coming to the Northern Territory to work and build something here. My crowning achievement in my time in the public service in that regard was multi-stakeholder pledge 07521—which you can google on the United Nations Global Refugee Forum site—which reads:

The Australian Federal Government, in partnership with the Northern Territory Government, Talent Beyond Boundaries and Fragomen, pledge to facilitate 100 job matches by June 2024 under Australia's Skilled Refugee Labour Agreement Pilot, providing a pathway for skilled refugees and displaced persons to live and work in the Northern Territory, Australia. The partnership is a practical example of how businesses and business leaders can harness the talent of refugees to address skills shortages, creating a win-win for displaced people, employers and the wider community.

That agreement should have brought 100 skilled workers and their families to the Northern Territory, but, unfortunately, the former Labor government did not see the merit in it. That is why I left my job and entered this place to progress that work and try to address our demographic decline.

I am proud to announce that although we could not get 100 workers and their families here and that most of the deal evaporated and fell apart, the last four of those people—a renal nurse, an emergency care nurse, an oncology nurse and a hospital pharmacist—and their families from other countries had their permanent visas issued. In December, God willing, they and their families will arrive in Darwin to build a new life, contribute and hopefully be like the Timor-Leste refugees who came 50 years ago.

It is a small thing, and I am sad we could not realise the full totality of the program, but I am hopeful that it may be the beginning of something where we not only open our hearts but also use our heads to try to turn around demographic decline in the north of Australia.

Some of the biggest players in the world have said things like:

'Consider refugees, undocumented labour migrants, as a source of labour. With the growing worldwide turmoil poised by political conflict, economic distress and climate disasters, this group of individuals offer skills and opportunities. Some governments are ahead of the curve and are already creating concessions to fill labour gaps. Further, complementary pathways, though still nascent, can match displaced talent with employers.'

That was a quote from the Fragomen report provided the world over to some of the biggest corporates.

The former minister for immigration wrote to the former Chief Minister of the Northern Territory in the last government to say:

'The Northern Territory Government's involvement in the pilot represents an exciting opportunity to be involved in a novel migration concept at the outset, which could over time have real and lasting benefits for NT employers, the NT economy, as well as the wider NT community. The partnership is a win-win for refugees and displaced people and for the NT as it gains highly sought-after skills that boost the economy and enrich society.'

Complementary pathways is not a silver bullet, but it is an opportunity. It is one of the many opportunities I would like us to seize when we are trying to rebuild the Northern Territory economically and demographically.

The Department of Home Affairs was onboard and willing to hear us out if we could demonstrate independent evidence of successful execution of this pilot. I am hoping that although the original deal has lapsed, we will still be able to demonstrate that we can grow the Territory by utilising bespoke migration mechanisms in the north of Australia. We need to do so; it is vital for north Australia and national security, and it is a win-win for all involved.

There are global eyes on this program still. The World Health Organization, the UK Government, the global forum on refugee mobility and the University of Sydney and ANU are still auditing the work we are doing. We need to accommodate these people and settle them into the Northern Territory. Housing will be a challenge.

I thank the Minister for International Education, Migration and Population and the Minister for Health in particular for allowing me to continue this work in earnest and supporting me wholeheartedly. They could have killed the program, and they did not. I am grateful that they have given it room to run. I likewise want to thank our partners with Talent Beyond Boundaries, Jemma Bailey and Louna Ghawi; and at Fragomen, Teresa Liu and Jannet Balite.

Whilst migration is not a substitute for investing in the skills of Australians, well-targeted migration can complement local skills while contributing to productivity growth. We need dialogues not just on size but on the composition of the migration program.

Just like those first East Timorese refugees to Darwin, I pray that in another 50 years there will be another story of hope and triumph that we will be able to tell and that we will welcome these people with open arms and open hearts.

DISTINGUISHED VISITOR
Hon Peter Chandler

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Honourable members, in the gallery we have the former Member for Brennan and minister in the NT Government, Peter Chandler, and his wife Robyn. Welcome Peter; good to see you here. For those who do not know, Peter is part of the band, Peter, Paul & Jacko. They play wonderful music, and he will be playing at a special event for us in December.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs FINOCCHIARO (Spillett): Mr Deputy Speaker, today is the last day of parliamentary sittings for 2025, and I wish everyone in the Chamber a safe and merry Christmas.

It has been a big year, and I thank my parliamentary team, who have been incredible to work with over the last 15 months of government. We have just achieved our first full year in government; it is a 12-month period that we can be proud of.

This year we have pushed through more reform than the Territory has seen in a generation, and we have stayed true to our belief of reducing crime, rebooting the economy and restoring our beautiful lifestyle. To the entire team, I say thank you so much for all your support, hard work, dedication and tenacity, making sure we are delivering the change that the Territory needs and deserves.