



**NORTHERN TERRITORY**  
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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*Member for Fong Lim*

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**HANSARD EXTRACT**

**NZ GLOBAL WORKER ATTRACTION**

TUESDAY 29 JULY 2025

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*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 Kumanjaji 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