

Madam Speaker Aagaard took the Chair at 10 am.

### **MINISTERIAL REPORTS** **Cairo Bus Crash**

**Mr HENDERSON (Police, Fire and Emergency Services):** Madam Speaker, our police officers often face dangerous and difficult situations in the line of duty. Every day, they perform acts of bravery as part of their efforts to keep our community safe. This commitment to helping others does not end when Northern Territory police officers are off duty.

For three of the Territory's police officers, this is exactly what happened during a once-in-a-lifetime trip overseas. Detective Senior Constable Carmen Butcher and Superintendents Jeanette Kerr and Helen Braam were part of a study tour involved in a horrific bus crash just outside of Cairo in January this year. Luckily, none of the three Territory officers were travelling in the bus that crashed – a crash that resulted in the death of six people, including three police officers from Victoria and a 14-year-old Victorian boy. They were travelling in a second bus and witnessed the horrific incident. They immediately rushed to assist the crash victims, thinking nothing of their own personal safety.

Detective Senior Constable Butcher went to the aid of a lady trapped under the bus and was able to assist in pulling her to safety. It was a selfless act of courage. Unfortunately, the roof of the crashed bus collapsed on Senior Constable Butcher immediately after the rescue. Taking the brunt of the roof collapse, she suffered a number of injuries including a seriously fractured pelvis that required surgery. Senior Constable Butcher's actions – and those of the other rescuers including Superintendents Kerr and Braam – were nothing short of heroic. Their first and only concern was for the injured and trapped victims of the crash.

This is indicative of their commitment and dedication as police officers, but also of their natural willingness to help others. It is not the first time that Senior Constable Butcher has helped others in this way – she has received commendations twice in the past five years for helping accident victims. She and her colleagues are a credit to the police force and to the Northern Territory. I understand the Police Commissioner will be considering these three outstanding officers for commendation medals as a result of their selfless and heroic actions in the wake of the bus crash.

Another Territorian played a significant role following the crash and is also deserving of recognition. Mary Williams, the Clinical Nurse Manager at Tennant Creek Hospital, was also

enjoying this once-in-a-lifetime adventure when tragedy struck. Fortunately, she avoided injury. I understand she worked tirelessly, providing crucial assistance to crash victims without a second thought for herself. I have no doubt that her efforts, like those of others who came to the aid of the injured, helped to reduce some of the suffering of those people.

On behalf of the Territory government, I commend Mary Williams for the invaluable assistance she provided following this incident.

It is always difficult to comprehend senseless tragedies such as the Cairo bus crash. However, one of the positives to come out of this terrible accident was the way people came together to assist the injured, comfort each other, and support the family and friends of those hurt or killed. I acknowledge the support and assistance provided to Carmen, Jeanette, Helen, Mary and others involved following the accident by a range of individuals and agencies, including NT Police, the Australian Federal Police, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Victoria Police. These agencies worked closely together to assist and give comfort to all those involved in the accident.

I understand every effort was made to ensure Carmen received the best care possible. After undergoing surgery in Cairo, she was transported by air ambulance to a hospital in London where she was cared for until she was well enough to travel home to Australia. She is now back in the Territory recovering from her injuries. I visited her earlier this week in hospital and she was in high spirits considering the severity of her injuries.

Superintendents Kerr and Braam are also back in the Territory and on leave. I am sure it will take them some time to come to terms with this terrible incident. I understand they are receiving much support from family and friends.

Madam Speaker, while we are extremely thankful that our police officers are now home, alive and well, following this horrific ordeal, some people were not so lucky – our thoughts and prayers are with their families and friends.

**Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, I thank the minister. I commend him on making this statement. I thought he would and it is entirely appropriate that the efforts of these fine Territorians be acknowledged by us all in this parliament and beyond.

The Northern Territory is a small place. I do not know Mary Williams, but I know Carmen, Jeanette and Helen, and have some friends who were in pretty constant touch with Carmen Butcher who, in relatively recent times, has been serving in

Tennant Creek and Gove. I understand she has bought a house in Alice Springs and will be returning to God's own country as soon as she possibly can.

I sincerely join with the minister in expressing our thanks and admiration to these women given the magnitude of the events. It was clearly a national story and it was not a bad day to be a Territorian. Our people did not hesitate, as you have said, minister, they ripped straight into it. I wish them all well. I know recovery will take some time. I know that they are receiving support from friends and family. I assume that they will receive ongoing support from you as minister and the commissioner and all of their colleagues in the police force. Once again, thank you for making the statement this morning. I am sure they will be well and truly chuffed.

### **Alice Springs Town Camps Taskforce**

**Mr McADAM (Local Government):** Madam Speaker, today I present a ministerial report on the Alice Springs Town Camps Taskforce. This is an issue of great concern to the people of Alice Springs and Central Australia; and as it is a work in progress, it is an issue on which I will report regularly to parliament.

The task force will assess the current state of town camps in Alice Springs and will consult widely with town camp representatives, service delivery agencies and other interested stakeholders. That process has begun this week. A report will be delivered in April 2006. The task force will need to examine both new and existing strategies such as the Community Harmony strategy, Connecting Neighbours, community patrols, and the IHANT Living Skills program to identify ways of improving social conditions on town camps and their subsequent impacts on the broader community.

In addition, the task force has developed a terms of reference which includes identifying gaps in services and suggested service models which may be used to improve services in town camps, assess the potential for increased employment and training outcomes for young adults, identify strategies, in addition to those being implemented through the Connecting Neighbours program, to harmonise relationships between people living on town camps and the rest of the Alice Springs community. A copy of the full terms of reference is available from my department.

The task force has met on three occasions and extensive consultations have been held with representatives of the Tangentyere Council which represents the collective interests of the 18 housing associations. Tangentyere provides wide-ranging services to people living on the town

camps. The task force will examine how the allocation of resources and the management of programs might be improved to more efficiently and effectively meet the needs of all concerned.

The task force has called for submissions from service providers and the public, seeking their views not only on the issues but also on how to make things better for everyone in Alice Springs. Identifying solutions to problems associated with visitors from bush communities to Alice Springs and, in particular, to town camps will be one of the major challenges confronting the task force.

The town council and the native title holders of Alice Springs have an important role to play in shaping the future of the town. It is, therefore, pleasing that both the Mayor and the Chair of the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation have agreed to participate on the task force. The task force will meet with key government agency representatives in a bid to maximise the collaborative effort required to attend to the complex challenges confronting the town.

Recent mobility studies indicate that the town camp population in Alice Springs may be as high as 3000 at any one time and that many of these people are living under considerable stress. Steps must be taken to improve living conditions on these community living areas and to give people greater opportunity to choose alternative pathways to improve their livelihoods. This means better access to education, employment, health services and housing.

The importance of law and order in any community cannot be over emphasised. To make town camps and surrounding areas safer places to live, we must take positive steps to control substance abuse which is most often the trigger for so much of the antisocial behaviour currently experienced in Alice Springs. This is not just a challenge for the task force - it is a challenge for the broader community. I seek the community's support and cooperation in developing and implementing strategies to address this complex issue.

**Dr LIM (Greatorox):** Madam Speaker, I was pleased to hear about the Alice Springs Town Camps Taskforce. I had occasion to speak with William Tilmouth before the first meeting of the task force, and was, indeed, pleased that at long last something appears to be taking place to get our town camps in Alice Springs in order. You will recall that town camps were set up as transitional living areas for bush people coming to live in the town in safety in a place where they can have facilities made available to them and not be exposed to the dangers of living in a foreign place.

Unfortunately, over the years, much of the safety in town camps disappeared and many people felt powerless and less able and are now victims of much disturbance within those town camps. I made some suggestions to William Tilmouth about providing expertise within the town camps to ensure that people living in those town camps will get instruction about urban living. That is what is important here. If you are going to move in thousands upon thousands of people from the bush into Alice Springs, there is going to be a huge cultural impact both for the people moving into the town and for the people living in Alice Springs also. You also need to ensure that the people who come in understand what culture they are coming in to and how they can live together harmoniously in a town such as Alice Springs. It is very important.

**Mrs BRAHAM (Braitling):** Minister, I hope it is not going to be just a talkfest. I hope we get some action out of it because already we have the town council which has obligations to town camps. Madam Speaker, we have Tangentyere which is well funded for town camps. Why are they in such a mess? Where is the accountability of the organisations that are supposed to be looking after them now? Let us face it, they have obligations but they are certainly not fulfilling them.

The people in town camps should show leadership, should be given assistance to look after their camp. The health and hygiene standards are appalling, and you can look back at the people who are supposed to be enforcing those. The number of camp dogs we have and the vicious attacks are unreasonable. No one should have that many dogs running around dirty as it is. We have continually heard about the number of kids not going to school, even though we have Yeperenye School which sends buses for them. It is a problem; we all know that. I am saddened at some of the living conditions of people on town camps, and the humbug they get from visitors from town.

Let us not just make this a talkfest. Let us try to put down some achievable goals. Let us say in six months time: 'This is what we have done'. Let us not say we are still talking about it. It is a bit like the Living Skills program: 'One day we will implement it, but I am not sure when'. I would like to see many of the Aboriginal members of this House say to their people: 'This is not good enough. You should be the role models. You should be out there giving them leadership, giving them guidance'. As it is at the moment, no one is speaking up. I hope, minister, you will take it on because you have the respect of a lot of people, and I hope you get something done.

**Mr McADAM (Local Government):** Madam Speaker, I thank the respective members opposite

for their contribution. I do not wish to go into some of the historical views of the nature of town camps. I just want to assure the member for Greaterrex that there is a view quite separate in the context of whether a town camp is a transitional place or whether it is more than that.

Member for Braitling, I do not have any qualms at all in dealing with some of those issues that are occurring in Alice Springs. Other indigenous members on this side of the House and, indeed, all members on this side of the House, will make every effort to ensure that the capacity is given for those people to improve living conditions, and for a better lifestyle. No one is going to get up in this House and say they are going to fix those problems. I believe it is wrong to suggest that we as indigenous members have that capacity to resolve it. However, we will try very hard.

#### Roundtable on GP Recruitment and Retention

**Dr TOYNE (Health):** Madam Speaker, general practitioners are in integral part of the Northern Territory health care system and, in our Building Healthier Communities framework, are seen as vital in reducing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Territorians. Of course, private general practice is, and remains, a Commonwealth responsibility. It is their responsibility to encourage GPs to engage in rural and remote health. However, difficulties in recruitment and retention of private GPs impact on our publicly run health services, as we have seen in recent times.

While GP shortage is a national problem, it is worse in the Territory where the ratio of full-time GPs per 10 000 people is 4.7 compared to 8.6 per 10 000 nationally. This shortage is felt most acutely in our regional centres such as Tennant Creek and remote communities.

The national shortage inevitably results in state and territory jurisdictions competing with one another to recruit doctors from the available pool of appropriately qualified and experienced Australian and overseas-trained doctors to work in regional centres and remote communities. There is also a level of competition within the Territory between government agencies, non-government organisations, and the private sector employing the same doctors. There is a need for the three sectors to work together to develop measures to ensure that the remote sector, in particular, is not disproportionately disadvantaged by the overall shortage.

Whilst the Northern Territory government is not formally responsible for the recruitment of GPs except for its own medical work force, the worsening situation has led the Northern Territory government to take action. I have raised this issue at the recent Australian Health Ministers

Conference in Adelaide. I have taken a leading role to initiate the development of innovative solutions to address the shortage in partnership with Australian government agencies, non-government organisations and the private GP sector.

On 12 December 2005, it convened a round table on the recruitment and retention of GPs in the Northern Territory bringing together key government, non-government and private sector players from around the Territory to explore the issues and consider the short-, medium- and long-term solutions to a problem that confronts the whole community which has been with us for far too long. Round table participants included senior representatives from across the sector, my department, the Australian government Department of Health and Ageing, Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT, the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health, the General Practice Primary Health Care NT, the Medical Board NT, the Top End Division of General Practice, the Centre for Remote Health, the NT Rural Doctors Association, the NT General Practice Education, and Katherine West Health Service.

The discussions and exploration of the issues were fruitful in identifying key areas for action. These include:

- reporting on progress in implementing the action plan for the Darwin statement on sustainable general practice in Aboriginal primary health care, a process which unites the efforts of key players in addressing GP recruitment and retention issues in remote communities;
- examining business practices to maximise the uptake of Medicare payments and arrest the decline in MBS income for doctors;
- developing a unified database on the medical work force to facilitate information exchange between key agencies. The NT needs good evidence about its work force as a basic requirement to developing sound work force policies;
- improving processes for the NT registration, support and supervision of OTDs upon whom we are becoming increasingly reliant for filling regional and remote GP vacancies;
- developing flexible models of working across the acute care or hospital and community care sectors that might be

more attractive to GPs as career development opportunities;

- engaging the Territory research institutions such as the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health;
- developing career pathways to 'grow our own' and attract young Territorians to become NT doctors; for example, through the development of a local feeder course qualification into graduate medical training programs at Flinders University with access to the NT Clinical School;
- consistently supporting fair distribution of GPs Australia-wide,
- developing short-term solutions to address the rate of change in the work environment; and
- exploring opportunities to invest in more primary health care to reduce costs in the overall health system.

Representatives from the key participating organisations agreed to work together on these action areas and, by working in partnership, will bring to bear different perspectives and a broader range of experience than otherwise would be the case. We have to work on this together. It is a critical issue for the Northern Territory and for the nation. In the Territory, we have to be more proactive than most to get more than our share of doctors out of a shortage that exists both nationally and internationally.

**Dr LIM (Greatorrex):** Madam Speaker, I am going to ask the minister to explain what he means by being 'more proactive'. The minister speaks about a whole heap of bureaucratic processes. Well and good that you have a talkfest to try to increase the number of GPs in the Northern Territory but, really, you need to do something about it more effectively. The minister had every opportunity to do it himself in at least one case when a GP in town, who was initially recruited by the Alice Springs Hospital and through a whole heap - and I do not want to go into detail - of mismanagement by the hospital, this doctor left the hospital. He would be the fourth doctor within the space of 12 months who left the hospital because of dissatisfaction with the management system.

This last doctor wrote to the minister, and said: 'Minister, I no longer work for the Health Department but I am now employed by another agency. I hope you will continue to support my permanent residency status with the Immigration department'. What did the minister do? He wrote

a letter back to him and said: 'You are on your own now. You do not work for us anymore. You do what you have to do to ensure you get your own permanent residency status'. He had every opportunity to retain one GP in this town, and he did not bother to do it. His letter was the most dismissive letter I have ever seen a minister write to any constituent in the Territory. It is a disgrace!

Minister, if you are serious about increasing the number of doctors, general practitioners, in the Territory, then be supportive. Do not just say: 'Oh, I am going to set up all these processes to talk about it and eventually say to the federal government: "It is your responsibility, you produce the GPs and then we can get some"'. The Charles Darwin University could take part strongly in promoting its medical course with the Flinders Medical Centre, and go from there ...

**Madam SPEAKER:** Member for Greatorex, your time has expired.

**Dr TOYNE (Health):** Madam Speaker, I would have thought the member for Greatorex was well placed to make a contribution to efforts to get doctors into the Northern Territory. Instead, he is so hell-bent on trying to whack me with a feather on party political lines that he really has very little to say constructively about this issue, and has not for some time.

Maybe he should see the CLP members who sit in the federal parliament and get them to join us in putting pressure on the federal Health minister to get some better arrangements for the training and distribution of GPs around the country instead of trying to score political points here in this House.

Reports noted.

**WORK HEALTH AMENDMENT  
(ADVISORY COUNCIL) BILL  
(Serial 36)**

Bill presented and read a first time.

**Mr STIRLING (Employment, Education and Training):** Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a second time.

The bill incorporates provisions for an independent chairperson of the Work Health Advisory Council and, in addition, mandates that one of the 10 positions on the council allows for the appointment of the chief executive or delegate as a member of the council.

The council presently consists of the chief executive officer as the chairperson and not more than 10 other members who are ministerial appointments. The Acting Deputy Chief Executive

Education Services from the Department of Employment, Education and Training has undertaken the role of chairperson of the council at the delegation of the chief executive.

The issue of the appointment of an independent chairperson to this council has been considered by Work Health Advisory Council members and industry stakeholders including employers, unions, the Insurance Council of Australia, and legal representatives. All expressed a strong preference to appoint an independent chairperson of the council. In his consultancy report on the Review and Redesign of the Office of Work Health 2003, Mr David Lee also recommended the appointment of an independent chairperson of the Work Health Advisory Council.

The Work Health Advisory Council's strategic direction is to forge partnerships with the business sector and work collaboratively for a safer working environment. This appointment of an independent chairperson would allow for a person from within Northern Territory industry and outside of government to lead our diverse professional and experienced Work Health Advisory Council membership to provide advice to the minister and to assist the progress of the key objective of keeping Territory workplaces free of injury, death and disease.

The benefits of an independent chairperson of this council appointed by the minister are that the appointment will, by nature, infer a more transparent, equitable and industry-driven process for the provision of advice to the minister.

The bill will allow the minister to choose an independent chairperson of high status who has qualifications and experience relevant to the position, thus raising the status and profile of the Work Health Advisory Council. The appointment would be perceived to be more independent of government, although government will still have representation on the council.

Furthermore, the bill may be perceived by some sectors to make provision for a more impartial reflection of matters concerning occupational health and safety issues in the Northern Territory, and should result in improved participation levels from industry if the council is seen to be chaired by a person from the broader community.

Madam Speaker, I commend the bill to honourable members.

Debate adjourned.

**MOTION**  
**Illegal Fishing Incursions in**  
**Northern Territory Waters**

**Mr VATSKALIS (Primary Industry and Fisheries):** Madam Speaker, I move that this Assembly:

- (a) express its serious concern about increasing illegal foreign fishing incursions in our waters and foreign nationals establishing camps throughout northern Australia;
- (b) note that these increasing incursions threaten not only the sustainability of our shark and other fisheries, but place our biosecurity and national sovereignty at great risk;
- (c) call upon the Commonwealth government to agree to fund the expansion of the indigenous marine ranger program throughout northern Australia as a matter of urgency;
- (d) call upon the Prime Minister to personally convene an urgent summit of all relevant ministers and stakeholders to develop a national strategy to combat foreign fishing vessel incursions throughout northern Australia, noting that actions by a raft of federal agencies have thus far failed to deter illegal incursions; and
- (e) through the Office of the Speaker, forward the terms of this motion and associated debate to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Commonwealth parliament.

Madam Speaker, I have brought this motion to this House out of frustration with the inability or unwillingness of the federal government to protect our northern fisheries. I say unwillingness because the federal government was very keen to protect the fisheries of the Patagonian toothfish in the southern ocean, to the effect they gave orders to Australian Navy ships to travel thousands of miles to apprehend a foreign fishing vessel in the southern ocean. I say the inability to protect the fisheries' resources and also to provide an adequate border security to protect the primary industry in Northern Australia from biosecurity threats and to work closely with us in the states and territories of Northern Australia.

By tragic coincidence, just a few minutes ago, from the balcony of my office, I saw a 75 m steel hulled, Panamanian flagged vessel coming into port escorted by an Australian Navy boat. This boat was caught just outside Territory islands, containing several hundred fish and allegedly acting as a mother ship for illegal fishing in the area, something I have warned the federal government about repeatedly.

This motion highlights the serious and increasing threats that illegal foreign incursions pose to the Northern Territory fisheries resources, our biosecurity and Australia's national sovereignty. These illegal foreign fishing incursions are not simply subsistence fishers, but the majority are using sophisticated fishing vessels with echo sounders, radar and global positioning systems, and target shark fins and, increasingly, our tropical snappers for sale on international markets.

I have raised these concerns with the former Commonwealth Minister for Fisheries on too many occasions and, indeed, suffered the odd rebuke when the federal minister suggested my comments were petty. Most of my letters to the former Commonwealth minister about foreign fishing incursions remain unanswered two years later. The former federal minister was certainly aware of the threats posed by illegal foreign fishing. In launching Seaweek 2005, the then federal minister said:

*Unfortunately, to the north of Australia, we have a lot of nasty people who come in and steal our sharks. They take the fins off the shark because they are worth about \$600/kg in Asia at the moment.*

*Many of these illegal fishermen take the fins off the sharks while they are still alive, and throw the body back into the water, where they have a very painful death. We are very determined to stop that. Our Australian Navy and Customs patrol boats have formed a 'big curtain' across the top of Australia to stop these pirates coming in and taking our sharks and being cruel to them.*

Madam Speaker, perhaps the 'big curtain' across the top of Australia to which the former minister refers simply obscured the Commonwealth view from Canberra, as it has done very little to stem the influx of illegal foreign fishing.

It has been revealed, through a freedom of information request, that 8180 foreign fishing vessels were sighted within the Australian fishing zone in 2004-05, with up to 22 foreign fishing vessels being sighted each day. The extent of

foreign fishing incursions and the threats posed to our fisheries, biosecurity and sovereignty has been widely reported in the media over a long time. The Commonwealth government indicates that the level of foreign vessels apprehension is proof that it is determined to combat illegal fishing. While 8180 foreign fishing vessels were sighted, only 280 were apprehended. A further 327 vessels were dealt with under the federal government's 'administrative seizure', also known as the 'catch and release' policy. Federal authorities are increasingly resorting to administrative seizures in which the catch and fishing gear is confiscated and vessels are ordered from Australian waters. There are reports of illegal caches of replacement fishing equipment on Australia's northern coast and it is likely that the illegal vessels are re-equipped at sea, hence the 75 m steel hulled boat.

It has been suggested that the 'catch and release' policy may be viewed as a softening of Australia's policy to apprehend and seize illegal fishing vessels as a deterrent to illegal incursions. Unfortunately, the ratio of 'apprehensions' to 'legislative forfeitures' is on the decline.

Customs officials themselves concede that the level of resources is insufficient. As reported in the *Northern Territory News*, the then Darwin-based Coastwatch manager, Ms Jenny Anderson, admitted that the foreign fishermen are winning. At a marine conference in Darwin in mid-2005, Ms Anderson said: 'Whatever we're doing isn't working', and she cited the increasing penetration deep into Australia's exclusive economic zone as evidence that the actions of the Commonwealth were proving ineffectual. It was brave of Ms Anderson to speak out against Commonwealth government policy and, unfortunately, after that speech, Ms Anderson ceased to be the manager of Customs in Darwin.

AFANT has raised its concerns directly with the Commonwealth government. Similarly, the Northern Territory Seafood Council has publicly stated its concerns about the threats that illegal foreign fishing pose to the future of our fisheries and the local businesses that rely on them.

Recreational fishers from Nhulunbuy photographed illegal foreign fishers using nets and relayed the advice to the federal authorities. Unfortunately, the vessel was not apprehended as no surface response vessels were available. Commercial fishers report increased sightings of illegal foreign vessels with reports of foreign fishers approaching local fishers on the rise. The fishing charter industry also reports interaction with illegal foreign fishing vessels. A charter operator was transiting from Gove to Darwin when he reported illegal foreign fishermen netting for sharks within sight of our coastline. A land-based fishing

tour operator on the Tiwi Islands reported an illegal foreign fishing vessel moored in a coastal creek.

While I do not condone individuals taking the law into their own hands, I appreciate the frustration experienced by indigenous marine rangers at Maningrida over the ongoing incursions and delays in response by federal authorities that lead to the apprehension of the vessel. A similar action by commercial fishermen led to a situation in which federal authorities directed the release of the vessel and the commercial fisherman faced possible criminal prosecution. The Maningrida rangers conduct aerial and sea patrols at their own expense and have detected foreign fishing vessels hidden in coastal creeks.

An editorial appearing in the *Northern Territory News* on 11 October 2005 provides an insight into Territorian's views about foreign fishing:

*First, Environment Minister Ian Campbell crushes any hope of a small-scale crocodile safari hunting business in the Northern Territory.*

*Now Fisheries Minister Ian Macdonald tells us not to panic about illegal fishing – it's all well under control.*

*This is untrue - illegal fishing is anything but under control. And only somebody living in such a closeted world as Canberra could think otherwise.*

And continuing:

*Yes, more boats are being caught, but that's because many more are working in our waters. And more than a few are missed - the majority get away.*

*Who says so? Customs.*

*It has admitted that what it is doing to arrest the flood of illegal fishing vessels is not working.*

Nigel Scullion, the CLP, or perhaps now the National Senator for the Northern Territory, has a particular interest in foreign fishing. Prior to entering parliament - and perhaps as a Senator - he had commercial interests in servicing detained foreign fishers in Darwin Harbour and he was a past chairman of the Northern Territory Seafood Council. In a parliamentary speech on border protection in 2005, the Senator for the Northern Territory said:

*We have had an unprecedented attack - without precedent, in international fishing arrangements—on our border security, and the outcome has been that we*

*have resisted, and we have, across a large number of fronts, ensured that our border integrity is absolutely ironclad.*

In his speech, Senator Scullion documents the considerable threats posed by illegal incursions. But in January 2006, in an interview with Daryl Manzie of Top FM, Senator Scullion offered a very different view and I quote again:

*If I could just say one thing in closing, Daryl. You know there's been some discussions about the illegal fishing and potentially I could do something about the illegal fishing. Well I can assure Territorians, I am disappointed with the level of illegal fishing, particularly the inshore stuff that's been happening over the last four months. I've been lobbying very strongly to have some changes and I don't want to get into the technical details or the difficulties we've been having. But I'm going to ensure over the next two to three months, as soon as they go back there that we really need to change the tact, our policy position on some of these things and the sort of resources are being put into that. So that's going to be my focus when we get back.*

The Commonwealth government introduced legislation that requires all commercial export fisheries to demonstrate that they are sustainable, that they do not adversely impact on the environment and afford protection to vulnerable and endangered species. In effect, the Commonwealth government will prohibit the export of seafood products if any commercial fishery was not appropriately regulated.

A key plank in the Northern Territory submission was ensuring shark catches by recreational, commercial and indigenous fishermen were maintained within sustainable limits. In satisfying Commonwealth government export requirements, local shark fishermen agreed to operate for only 123 fishing days each year using pelagic nets, and only 18 days using long-lines under each licence. There has been a 20% reduction in the length of long-lines, and 25% reduction in the length of nets that local operators can use.

The shadow minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries has offered comments about this matter. In responding to my ministerial statement on the economic impact of the fishing industry in August 2005, the shadow minister said:

*Another serious threat to fishing in the Territory appears to be the rapid decline in shark stocks. This can be directly attributed to the illegal shark finning which was first highlighted in the NT News on Monday,*

*11 July, by a deckhand who took great courage to speak out following claims that illegal Indonesian fishermen were the cause.*

The article appearing in the *Northern Territory News* included claims by a deckhand that he had witnessed shark fins on a local fishing vessel. The shadow minister was suggesting that the rapid decline in shark stocks was due to the action of a very small number of local fishing vessels, and not the 8108 foreign fishing vessels sighted in 2004-05. Of those intercepted, the majority had shark fin aboard.

Understandably, Northern Territory shark fishermen were upset by these comments, and I understand they have written to shadow minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries, and I quote from the Licence Committee's letter:

*Your comments at best show absolute naivety of fisheries matters and at worst show a reckless portrayal of honest, hardworking Australian fishermen. As opposition fishery spokesperson, your lack of knowledge on the subject is a major concern.*

My office has recently provided a detailed briefing on foreign fishing incursions to the opposition spokesperson on Primary Industry and Fisheries, and I look forward to the shadow minister's reply.

As local fishermen generally process and freeze their catch at sea, a shark fin to body ratio ensures that local fishers do not engage in the wasteful practice of taking sharks for their fins and discarding the carcass at sea. Overall shark catch by local operators is around 800 to 1000 tonnes each year. The estimated legal harvest by foreign fishing vessels is in the order of 5000 to 25 000 tonnes of shark. That is five to 25 times the catch of our local legitimate commercial shark fishers. The illegal harvest is simply not sustainable.

The cuts to fishing effort agreed with our local shark fishing industry are being eroded by illegal foreign fishing incursions. Unregulated illegal foreign fishing vessels are not subject to any controls, and most vessels are apprehended with shark fin aboard. About 5 kg is required to cover the costs of an illegal fishing trip - generally one large shark - with a 'beach price' return on catch of about \$A120/kg for illegally harvested shark fin. In general, this can be easily achieved in the first day of fishing. The replacement cost of a boat is approximately \$A5000 should the fishermen be unlucky enough to get caught and lose the boat. This is the equivalent of 40 kg of dried shark fin at 'beach' prices. High quality fin is on-sold by owners for \$A250/kg wholesale, so, for them, the

replacement cost of a boat is 20 kg of shark fin - just four large sharks.

Illegal foreign fishing vessels are known to take endangered and protected species such as dolphins, turtles, dugongs and sea birds. The effect of this activity on the stock of these fish is unknown.

In recognition of the expanding local catch of sharks and the potential negative impacts on shark populations, the Commonwealth government championed the adoption of an International Plan of Action for the Conservation and Management of Sharks. This was agreed at the 23<sup>rd</sup> session of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation's Committee on Fisheries in 1999. The National Plan of Action – Sharks is a voluntary international instrument developed so that nations can take positive action to ensure the conservation and management of sharks and their long-term sustainable use.

A National Plan of Action has been implemented with considerable input from the Northern Territory and other states. Whilst the federal government is keen to travel overseas to highlight the vulnerability of shark fisheries to overfishing, it appears somewhat reluctant to address the serious influx of illegal foreign fishing incursions on Northern Australia shark stocks.

Responsibility for foreign fishing vessel incursions clearly resides with the Commonwealth government. When it comes to the Indian Ocean (Western Australia), Southern Ocean (southern Australia), and Pacific Ocean (east coast of Australia), the federal government has made great strides in forging regional intergovernmental agreements for fisheries resources. In contrast, no such agreement has been reached for the Northern Territory or northern Western Australia, nor the Gulf of Carpentaria where it is needed the most. Our fishing zone directly adjoins that of our international neighbours, yet there is no formal regional agreement in place for northern Australia.

In raising this issue with the then Commonwealth minister in early 2004, he undertook to host a regional forum of fisheries ministers from Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea, together with northern Australian fisheries ministers. I am still waiting for this meeting to take place. When recently in Jakarta to promote our livestock exports, I met with His Excellency, Mr Freddy Numberi, Minister of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs, to discuss issues of joint interest. The Indonesian minister appreciated the concerns raised and he indicated a willingness to contribute to stemming illegal fishing in both Indonesia and northern Australian waters.

Australia's approach to foreign fishing boat incursions must include the apprehension and destruction of the fishing boat capital and the gradual attrition of boats suitable to fish. The Commonwealth government has failed to provide sufficient resources to federal agencies given the influx of foreign fishing incursion. While an additional \$88m has been allocated, it will not see any more offshore patrol vessels in northern Australian waters.

Our government promotes the deployment of smaller patrol vessels along the coast, supported by an Aboriginal marine ranger program involved in intelligence gathering and, where appropriate, with training and support interceptions and apprehensions. Expansion of the marine ranger program will also provide the support base for Commonwealth agencies to rapidly respond to reports of illegal landings, particularly in ensuring biosecurity concerns. A new parity in the compliance approach is aimed at achieving uniform Team Australia management of the issue whilst, at the same time, minimising the cost of detention through the earliest release of fishermen, whilst targeting the masters of the fishing vessels and recidivists.

The other measures covering intelligence sharing, data collection, investigation and research are aimed at improving the efficiency and effectiveness of cross-jurisdiction cooperation, and there should be a greater focus on Indonesian capacity building and economic improvement aimed at improving sustainability of fish stocks in Indonesia, and assist in finding alternative livelihoods for fishing communities involved in illegal fishing, and combating organised crime. Surveys of shark and ray stocks in some areas of Indonesia suggest that they are severely overfished or nearly extinct.

It is well known and accepted by surveillance authorities and fishermen alike that any successful illegal fishing trip promotes further incursions. The current lack of compliance capability has reduced both the real and potential risk to illegal fishers which has, in turn, encouraged further investment in illegal fishing activity. A perceived lack of response capability and softening of Australia's incursion policy in the current environment has encouraged non-fishermen and criminal elements to enter into the shark fishery and fin business. Without immediate action to address the problem, it is highly likely the situation will continue to worsen to the extent where it will become an issue that not only threatens Australia's sovereignty, but also be a source of tension with regional neighbours.

In order to mitigate the threat from the originating ports, a program of education and training and involvement on viable alternative

livelihood opportunities needs to be instituted. This could be funded in part through realignment of some of Australia's overseas aid priorities, presumably primarily through the Commonwealth government international aid agency AusAID. There appears to be no coordinated plan to deal with these incursions, and certainly none that recognise the states/Territory as partners in a Team Australia approach to dealing with this important issue.

Recreational anglers, commercial fishers, indigenous marine rangers, Customs and even the Senator for the Northern Territory, all agree that the current approach is not working. The states/Territory have tried to assist the Commonwealth government in this area in resources, intelligence and political support, but the Commonwealth government has been slow to respond. Nevertheless, I welcome that the new federal minister is keen to meet with states and Territory to discuss foreign fishing and has flagged the need for greater resources.

The development of a national database capable of collating and analysing intelligence gathered by in-field surveillance agencies and clients is required. The existing databases are fractured, incomplete or incompatible. This results in the lost opportunity to bring together surveillance reports, boarding reports, anecdotal information and prosecution histories. The switch in focus from dedicated fishery patrols to multi-tasking has also seen a drop in high-quality intelligence from boarding activities of foreign fishing boats.

The states and the Territory will lose the access to fisheries intelligence when current Commonwealth government-funded contractual arrangements involving states and Territory-based fisheries officers cease.

There are difficulties associated with identifying offenders, repeat offenders, and recidivists in the course of apprehending illegal foreign fishing boats. Presently, foreign fishing crews are photographed and, in some jurisdictions, fingerprinted. These records across jurisdictions are of variable completeness in quality; determination about the recidivism is made based on knowledge of fishermen with extensive interaction, interviews, fingerprint analysis and photographic comparison.

Given the cumulative catch of shark species in particular by illegal foreign fishing, serious depletion of some stocks is possible. There are additional threats to endangered protected species such as dolphins, turtles, dugongs and sea birds. Statistics on the extent of these catches are required to determine the status of stocks and the risk of stock collapse. The state and Territory

governments contend that illegal foreign fishing incursions can be contained through a cooperative, coordinated approach involving both national and regional governments, proactive responses, formulating a strategic plan to combat illegal activity, and the targeting of specific areas through intelligence driven compliance operation.

Aside from the exploitation of fishery resources, there are considerable threats and risks to Australia's sovereign interests through illegal foreign fishing incursions, including the following:

- border security;
- economic viability of domestic fisheries. Local family businesses would be affected as catches decline;
- economic viability of remote communities;
- natural resource management interests in marine reserves and protected areas;
- protected and endangered species;
- ecosystem balance;
- biosecurity through the introduction of marine pests and disease outbreak, causing a significant risk to pearling, agriculture and the maritime industries. Territorians have first-hand experience of eradication of black striped mussel from Cullen Bay, Tipperary and the 'Duck Pond' marinas, with a bill of more than \$2m for its successful eradication. Black striped mussels and Asian green mussels have been detected on foreign fishing boats detained in Darwin Harbour;
- plant, insect and animal disease introduction that poses a significant risk to agriculture, conservation and export markets. The Territory's 'clean and green' image will undoubtedly be lost in the international marketplace. It will place our primary industry production and export markets at risk, a potential loss of hundreds of millions dollars. Birds, including chickens, cats, dogs, and even a monkey, have been discovered on illegal foreign fishing vessels;
- the introduction of high risk infectious human diseases, such as dengue fever, malaria, cholera, hepatitis and tuberculosis;

- theft of product and farm gear from pearl culture farms;
- physical threat to domestic fishers, charter operators and recreational fishers, remote communities and government officers;
- potential threats posed by terrorism against assets such as oil and gas installations; and
- criminal involvement of fishermen or others to smuggle illegal immigrants, drugs or weapons into remote parts of this country.

Illegal incursions by foreign fishing vessels are at record levels and appear to be on the rise. The Commonwealth government now concedes reports that foreign nationals are establishing camps throughout northern Australia to collect water, cache fishing equipment and shark fins, and to gather timber. More vessels are being detected in our offshore waters and there are an increasing number of incursions deep into our exclusive economic zone, so deep that they are landing ashore throughout the Territory. It has been recently revealed that in the first six months of 2000 alone, 99 illegal foreign fishing vessels were sighted within two nautical miles of the coast.

The motion calls on the Commonwealth government to fund an expansion of the indigenous marine ranger program. Established by our government in partnership with land councils and local communities, the indigenous marine ranger program has been a tremendous success. Rangers at Maningrida, Tiwi Islands, Elcho Island, and Anindilyakwa report increased sightings of illegal foreign fishers within sight of shore and, in many cases, landing on our coasts. Indigenous marine rangers not only provide intelligence about illegal fishing incursions, but also provide a valuable platform for Commonwealth government officials to undertake inspection of areas in which illegal foreign nationals have landed ashore. They have intimate knowledge of their lands and will provide for a more rapid response to illegal incursions. Funding will be required if they are to contribute to illegal fishing incursions. They have assisted with the rapid destruction of illegal foreign fishing vessels to mitigate quarantine risks.

The motion also calls on the Prime Minister to convene a summit to reach agreement on a national strategy to combat further incursions. Illegal foreign fishing incursions touch on so many Commonwealth portfolios, including Customs; Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry; Australian Defence Force; Coastwatch; Immigration; foreign affairs; foreign aid, national security; and public

health and others. It is for this reason the Prime Minister should take personal carriage in convening the summit to reach agreement on a national strategy, a coordinated Team Australia approach across federal government agencies to deliver a complementary service delivery.

Madam Speaker, I commend the motion to the Assembly.

**Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, I say to the minister that we could have this done and dusted inside 15 minutes if he liked. The minister knows that the opposition will be moving some amendments - some sensible amendments - and I will tell you why they are so sensible since you obviously do not understand why. I will tell you about them shortly. However, both sides of politics and, indeed, all Territorians, share the concern about illegal fishing. There is no doubt that in order to combat it more work needs to be done. We are with you on that. Indeed, we agree with the sentiment and intent of the motion that you provide to us this morning.

Minister, we are generally supportive. We acknowledge that the problem does need to be addressed and does need to be better addressed. However, the minister and I both know that this motion is more about politics and less about outcome and actions. Minister, the opposition believes that the federal government has not done enough in this area and we are continuing our efforts to play our part to encourage our federal colleagues to do better, and I will come to that shortly as well. The fact is that the federal government does need to commit more money in order to combat illegal fishing and more money is needed in relation to fighting it on both a short- and long-term basis.

The new federal minister is, on the face of it, taking a much more constructive and consultative approach with stakeholders and all levels of government, and we are pleased, as I am sure you are, with such an approach. The opposition, however, believes the motion the minister presents to us today is unnecessarily adversarial. We have gone down this path before when we have had other motions. I recall one motion that we did manage to amend so that we, as a parliament, provided it to the federal parliament, which I thought was a very strong a powerful message to the feds: 'Both sides of politics up here in the Northern Territory feel strongly about a particular issue'. In that case it was in relation to road funding. It is our view that we can, together, adopt such an approach in relation to this very serious issue.

Minister, if you want to pursue the matter and engage the new fisheries minister, it will take a significant and substantial commitment by the

federal government. Attempting to undermine the new minister by providing a paragraph which calls on the Prime Minister – in other words, going over the head of the minister to the Prime Minister - does not show cooperation, or any sort of cooperative intent, from you as the Territory minister.

You may know that on Monday this week, in Canberra, in Senate Estimates, two of your federal Labor parliamentary colleagues from Western Australia complimented the new fisheries minister on the approach he is taking to his new portfolio noting that he has only been in the job for - what? - two, three, four weeks. The fact that two of your federal parliamentary colleagues have complimented him is noteworthy. I ask myself, and you might like to ask yourself, if they can compliment him on his efforts so far, why on earth can't you find it within yourself to, if not do likewise, then at least give him the benefit of the doubt instead of providing what can be described in parts as a fairly provocative and intemperate motion?

We know that the federal government has already, before this new minister, put a significant amount of funding into the ranger program. Everyone is pleased with the role the rangers play, but we also know, as I am sure this Territory minister does, that they are part of a large number of things that are being done.

Minister, we are with you as to the intent of the statement. We are with you in acknowledging the importance of this issue and its significance to the Territory. We will be moving the amendments - and I will refer to them shortly - but notwithstanding the discussions that have occurred between the Whips, I urge you, if you are able, to reconsider your position. Our view is that a new minister should be engaged. If you, minister, are serious about improving the Territory's prospects of getting good results - and surely that is what we all want - then you should agree to the amendments. The amendments we will propose capture the intent of your motion. There is nothing lost in it, and we felt that was very important when we drafted our amendments. We were not getting into, with respect, the sort of grandstanding that we think that you and your government colleagues are displaying. We kept a cool head which is why you will observe, when I turn to the amendments, that they are measured and constructive.

The amendments invite the federal government and, in particular, a new minister, to earnestly consider on a bipartisan approach why it is that we, in the Northern Territory, feel so strongly about this issue. With the greatest of respect the motion before us does little to invite cooperation from a new federal minister. I spoke with the federal

minister this morning; it was a warm and fruitful discussion. Hon Eric Abetz is the new minister. He indicated that he is not going to have discussions by press release. He wants a fair dinkum, constructive, working arrangement. We do know you have your \$8m spin doctors up there on the fifth floor, but surely you could step back from grandstanding in the way that you and your colleagues do, on this occasion at least, and think about achieving results for the Northern Territory.

It does not really matter to me what you think of the coalition government in Canberra. It does not really matter to me what you think of a man you do not know. What does matter to me is the future of the Northern Territory, and the future of the fishermen in the Northern Territory. You said yourself in this statement that the illegal fishing industry involves a number of issues; security and biosecurity, not to mention the future of our fishing industry. These are not just Territory issues; these are issues that must be considered from the national interest. We all know that the federal government holds the key to this. I am not sure whether you have put yourself in the position of putting the federal minister's nose out of joint, but if you give him a statement like this, all I can say is that I wish you luck. In our view it is not the right way to go where you want to go, and we all want to get there. We urge you to reconsider your position in relation to the amendment.

The importance of this, for the reasons I have outlined, is not something deserving of political grandstanding. It is an issue that deserves a statesman-like approach. Unfortunately, on the face of it, it seems that you are more interested in politics than outcomes. When I contacted minister Abetz' office this morning they were somewhat surprised by today's motion because, as I understand it, they were trying to arrange a meeting with you next week. Therefore, we question whether this particular approach is going to work. We question its sincerity. We certainly question the wisdom of it. As I have said, it is not necessarily the right approach to go to a bloke who holds all the cards and say: 'G'day, my name is Kon. Can you help us out?'. You have put yourself in a position where you have a motion that, whilst its intent is good, its aggravation and provocative nature is likely to not assist you in the way you think it might. This takes us back to the position where we believe that this is nothing short of political grandstanding.

However, if nothing of what I have said has persuaded the minister to change his mind, then can he at least think of the Territory's fishers? We can do all sorts of things in here, but it is important for all of us to get outside the building and look at the world around us, and assess why it is that we got these jobs. You are a minister of the Crown, you are paid handsomely for representing those in

the portfolios for which you have carriage and, in a more general sense, Territorians and the future of the Northern Territory. When we are dealing with such serious issues this should not be tinkered with to the extent that the objective pales into insignificance because you might be able to get a media grab, or perhaps issue a couple of media releases along the way.

We are very sorry, minister, that the wording of your motion is the way it is. We, therefore, propose the following amendments. I have them here, and I will speak to them. I gather that ...

**Madam SPEAKER:** Leader of the Opposition, do you wish to move the amendments?

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, I move the amendments, Madam Speaker.

**Madam SPEAKER:** You need to read them into the *Hansard*.

**Ms CARNEY:** Yes, I am just about to find them, Madam Speaker. Got them!

I move the following amendments to the motion:

Omit all words after 'Assembly' and insert -

- (a) express its serious concern about increasing illegal foreign fishing incursions in our waters and foreign nationals establishing camps throughout northern Australia;
- (b) note that these increasing incursions threaten not only the sustainability of our shark and other fisheries, but place our biosecurity and national sovereignty at great risk;
- (c) call upon the Commonwealth government to agree to assist in funding programs such as the expansion of the indigenous marine ranger program throughout northern Australia as a matter of urgency;
- (d) note that the serious problem of illegal fishing appears to be outstripping federal government resources;
- (e) call on the federal Fisheries minister to advocate for more federal funding to combat illegal fishing, and develop a national strategy to address illegal fishing and combat foreign fishing vessel incursions throughout Australia;
- (f) note the commitment made by the federal Fisheries minister to work

constructively with other levels of government and stakeholders; and

- (g) through the Office of the Speaker, forward the terms of this motion and associated debate to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Commonwealth parliament.

They are fairly straightforward. In summary and in conclusion, it is an attempt to make the language that the minister used in his motion more constructive. Also, it does invite cooperation. The amendments are less adversarial. The opposition demonstrates and shares its concern with the Territory government, and notes that the feds could do better. It is also acknowledging that we have a new federal fisheries minister who should be engaged, and the language of that engagement should be less provocative than the ones you have brought into this House. We say that if you, minister, are serious about improving the Territory and getting good results, you should agree to these amendments. The amendments, in fact, capture the very intent of your motion.

With those comments, Madam Speaker, I will conclude. I look forward to hearing from the minister and some of his colleagues as to why it might be that he will reject our amendments.

**Madam SPEAKER:** All members from now on are speaking both to the original motion and the amendments as proposed by the Leader of the Opposition.

**Dr TOYNE (Justice and Attorney-General):** Madam Speaker, from the outset I certainly strongly support the minister's call for action to be taken regarding the issue of combating illegal fishing in our waters. Everyone can see the enormous economic and ecological damage that will continue to be done with the current situation.

In regard to the opposition's amendments, I will be leaving the minister to decide what he wants to say to the federal parliament and the federal minister. That is his call. My contribution to this debate is to deal with some of the matters that were raised in the motion, and those are ones that go to the possibility of introducing serious diseases into Australia and the Northern Territory.

As the minister stated, some 8180 foreign fishing vessels were sighted within the Australian fishing zone in 2004-05, with up to 22 foreign fishing vessels being sighted each day. Of these, only 280 were apprehended, and a further 327 vessels were dealt with under the federal government's administrative seizure. Aside from the obvious fact of the exploitation of Australia's

fisheries resources, there are many threats and risks to Australia's sovereign interests through illegal foreign fishing incursions, one of these being the introduction of high risk, infectious human diseases such as dengue fever, malaria, cholera, hepatitis and tuberculosis.

Changes to the federal legislation in 2005 require illegal fishers apprehended in Territory waters be brought onshore while legal processes are carried out. From 1 November 2005, custodial arrangements for illegal fishers which, prior to that date, responsibility fell within Australian Fisheries Management Authority, has now been transferred to the Australian Customs Service.

Illegal fishers may be carrying communicable disease of public health significance, and it is necessary to carry out timely health assessments to ensure fishers do not present a public health risk. The early detection, control and treatment of infectious diseases is essential, and my department, through the Centre for Disease Control, has been called upon to provide the necessary public health screening.

The Northern Territory government will continue to work collaboratively with the federal government on these important public health issues. My department has worked closely with the Australian Customs Service and the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs to develop a formal health assessment process. Accordingly, a new, more stringent, health assessment protocol has been developed. Using this new protocol, 473 fishers were screened in Darwin and 147 in Gove between 28 September 2005 and 27 January 2006. A number of fishers have been hospitalised for a range of medical conditions, and several cases of tuberculosis and malaria have been diagnosed and treated.

It is predicted that up to 1300 fishers will be screened annually. This represents, of course, a significant increase in workload for my department. In the past month, my department has been successful in attracting \$1.15m of new Commonwealth funding from the Australian Customs Service for support in the provision of these increased health assessments. This funding will greatly enhance our capacity to conduct these health assessments in Gove and Darwin, enabling an expansion and upgrade of screening facilities in Gove, and increased public health staff for Gove and Darwin. My department will continue to monitor the public health demands and work closely with the Commonwealth departments on this important health issue.

I was at the Centre for Disease Control a little while ago and saw the clinic facilities where they are carrying out the Darwin screening. First of all,

I commend the enormous expertise that we have in the Centre for Disease Control. Quite rightly, we are nationally and internationally known for being a very strong centre of expertise in these issues. I can reassure the Territory public that the barrier is there and it has been strongly maintained to make sure that we do not get incursions of people with communicable diseases. We have certainly prided ourselves in Australia of being free of some of these diseases that in other countries are taken almost as a background to the social and community life of those countries. We do not want diseases such as dengue and malaria getting loose in the Territory, and accordingly, these screening arrangements are very important to maintain.

By bringing forward the health aspects of the problem of illegal fishing in our waters, it also draws attention, I suppose, to the broadness of the problem that we are trying to combat. It does require a very strong cooperative arrangement between the Commonwealth and the Territory governments. It also requires a number of our agencies to contribute to the full coverage of aspects of this that are involved, whether it is economical or industry-based issues, the ecological issues, the impact on indigenous fishing grounds and indigenous life through that impact, or health. I believe that with our counterparts in the federal agencies we have to have a very clear plan. I strongly support a Team Australia approach to this. The minister is quite right in pointing to that absolute need to deal with these problems. I commend him for bringing the motion to the House.

**Mrs MILLER (Katherine):** Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that there is a serious problem with increasing numbers of illegal fishermen being sighted in the oceans off our northern coastline. The numbers have increased dramatically over the years, and it is obvious that serious action needs to take place. I thank the minister for arranging a briefing for me at reasonably short notice in January in relation to illegal fishing. It was very much appreciated. I was refused two other briefings in January, but that has been rectified as of this week. I am pleased about that. Obviously, the ministers have to be around to get the briefing. I would not have thought so, but never mind, it has been sorted out this week.

I have a folder here that contains copies of media reports, press releases and articles written by various people, and speeches that have been delivered in parliament. The scary thing is that that folder is only since September 2005, and it has all to do with illegal fishing. It is fairly obvious that the sightings of illegal fishermen are increasing and their activities, of course, are increasing and causing great concern across the top of Australia in general.

Senator Nigel Scullion addressed the federal parliament in October on a matter of public importance on illegal fishing and, during his address, he highlighted several issues that have contributed to this increase. I want to talk about a couple of these. The first problem is that the Indonesian fishermen have depleted their own waters by allowing foreign fishing boats in. That means that these fishermen have come further and further south over the past few years to earn a living, until, unfortunately, they are way inside our marine boundaries and, even in some instances, coming on to our Territory soil.

Another issue that Senator Scullion highlighted in his speech to federal parliament is that the majority of the illegal fishermen are Indonesian and in their home waters they earn around \$480 a year for their hard work. They can earn around \$600/kg for the product they take from Australian waters. When you look at the financial benefit they have by fishing in our waters with the incentive of earning their annual salary in a month by fishing illegally, it is obvious that these people are prepared to take any risk. It is also obvious that these fishermen are not traditional Indonesian fishermen trying to catch enough fish to feed just their families. These guys have sophisticated equipment and work with iceboats; in other words, they are professional fishermen.

The memorandum of understanding between the Australian and Indonesian governments was put in place over 30 years ago and addressed the needs of the traditional Indonesian fisherman. Over the years, this memorandum has been slowly but surely ignored as the fishing stocks in Indonesian waters have been severely depleted. The Indonesians have allowed fishermen from other countries into their waters, and as there were no rules and regulations on the size of catch that was taken they now have the problem of being unsustainable. What does that mean? It means that to make a living the fishermen have definitely had to move further south and they are still coming further south, right into our Australian waters and scarily enough right on to our coast.

In January of this year, I called on the previous federal minister for fisheries to work with the Indonesian government in reviewing the memorandum of understanding. I believe the Indonesian government is also extremely concerned about the amount of illegal fishing that is going on in our Australian waters. As I said in my letter to the federal minister, and in a press release at that time, boundaries are put in for a purpose. When it is obvious that these agreements are being abused and/or ignored, it is only appropriate that they are reviewed and strengthened to reflect the seriousness of the offences. I also said in that letter that the number of illegal fishermen sighted and apprehended in

our waters is increasing and with this comes our responsibility to support tough measures to put a stop to these crimes, as that is exactly what these are – crimes. I asked the federal minister to act as a matter of urgency as serious action is needed. In 2005 alone, more than 200 Indonesian fishing boats were apprehended in Australia's northern waters, fishing for delicacies such as shark fin, trepang and trochus which all fetch very high prices on the Asian market.

It is obvious to all of us that we have a serious problem in our northern waters. Late in January, the federal government announced it would give the Amateur Fishermen's Association of the Northern Territory more than \$43 000 funding for a project to help recreational anglers report illegal fishing. This funding is for a program called Your Eyes on the Water. As you know, we have a large number of recreational fishermen who are very passionate about their pastime in the Top End of the Northern Territory and they are out and about fishing mostly in remote locations, on our rivers and along our coastlines. They can act as eyes and ears for the police. This federal funding will establish a new hotline to report any illegal activity that recreational fishermen see, and it will be monitored by the Amateur Fishermen's Association.

To assist them in being able to report accurately, recreational fishermen will have education campaigns to advise them of what evidence police need to be able to act on a suspected illegal sighting. With the correct information and evidence, the police will be able to follow through with the investigation. At the moment, getting the accurate evidence is dependent on pot luck and, therefore, extremely difficult for police to be able to take any action. Recreational fishermen are very passionate about ensuring sustainable stocks well into the future for future generations. They are also extremely concerned about the environment; therefore, I am confident that this is a positive step. They are very happy to work in cooperation with the police to apprehend illegal fishermen to ensure the future sustainability of fish stocks for everyone.

I need to clearly point out that in no way do I put blame on the police for not apprehending more illegal fishermen. There are so few marine police for such a vast and remote coastline and waterways, let alone our river systems which extend right along our northern coastline and into the Gulf of Carpentaria. It is an impossible job to effectively police with so few positions allocated. This government - whose members constantly amaze me when they stand up in this Assembly and blame the Country Liberal Party for absolutely everything since Our Lord first put man on earth - have nothing to fall back on this time. This government has not taken the illegal fishing

seriously enough and now, when the going gets tough, they blame the federal government for not totally funding indigenous rangers to assist with our coastal and river surveillance.

What about additional marine police? It appears to me that the few we have trained in the Northern Territory are expected to be supermen - have eyes and ears everywhere, and be everywhere. Maybe the minister for Police could tell the Assembly just how many hours those marine police spend doing duties outside of the detection and apprehension of illegal fishermen. I am sure we will all be surprised.

More than ever, we need the cooperation of everyone in the communities across the Northern Territory who can possibly assist in addressing such a serious situation as illegal fishing.

One of the issues I would like to see toughened is in the penalty for offenders who are caught fishing illegally. The present arrangement is no deterrent. The living conditions in Indonesia are so poor that these people, when apprehended, must think they have arrived in paradise. Our gaol conditions provide better living environments for some of these people than when they are living at home. What is more, they get paid while being in gaol in Australia. At the end of the legal proceedings, they are flown home to Indonesia, and I have no doubt for most of them it is the first time on an aeroplane. What an adventure their fishing trip turned out to be! What deterrent is there in repeating this adventure over and over again? At the moment, our penalties are definitely not stringent enough.

I note that the recently appointed federal fisheries minister, Senator Eric Abetz, announced earlier this month that he believes a whole-of-government approach is needed to protect our borders and, most importantly, he supports the Western Australian government's moves to implement mandatory sentencing for repeat offenders. The Western Australian government has adopted new measures to deal with illegal fishermen within their jurisdiction. They intend to implement mandatory sentencing for repeat offenders with gaol terms of up to 10 years. That is what I call getting right down to dealing with the seriousness of this issue.

I know the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries is very concerned about illegal fishing. I believe he wants to do what he can to improve the situation. Could I suggest then that, in the best interests of Territorians, he talks with the Western Australian fisheries minister who has been keenly looking at their situation, which is exactly the same as ours, and also talk with the federal government minister Abetz and work cooperatively together as a whole-of-government to address this issue. We

will be able to have outcomes so much quicker and you will all work cooperatively and far more effectively. Federal minister Abetz has indicated that he believes the Indonesian government is serious about stopping fishermen from coming into Australian waters. Therefore, minister, in the best interests of Territorians and for a successful outcome, I would urge you to adopt a whole-of-government approach.

I will touch on the very important role that indigenous rangers can provide in addressing illegal fishermen. Our extensive coastline is remote and difficult to access, except for the indigenous communities living there. Naturally, they are on-site and have the best chance of sighting illegal fishermen who have, unfortunately, been able to get on to our coastline. I support the expansion of the indigenous rangers program. It will complement the whole-of-government, whole-of-community approach to detect and apprehending illegals. It is extremely important for these rangers to be extensively trained and provided with the resources necessary to ensure they are fully equipped to complete this important task. Employing rangers in these communities to assist in coastal protection is a great way of creating jobs where they are most needed, and it is also addressing a very important issue.

I do have some concerns, though. I wonder what powers these rangers will have in apprehending illegal fishermen. What do they do with them once they have apprehended them? What protection is there to safeguard these rangers from dangerous and violent illegals? Unfortunately, violence is becoming more common as these people are becoming more daring. There are serious concerns. I am sure the minister shares those concerns and I would like to hear what is being done to address those.

The member for Stuart spoke about the threat to our biodiversity from fishermen - and it is a very serious threat. We have witnessed a collection of birds and animals with unknown diseases, or may have unknown diseases, that have landed along our coastlines, not to mention the marine infestations that cling to the hulls of the old wooden boats that these fishermen use. All of these present huge problems that we need to put a stop to before they become more serious.

Apart from the animals being a threat, the fishermen themselves may have been exposed to infectious diseases in their own country before they have come on to our coastline. The possibility of tuberculosis, malaria, influenza and, unfortunately, even sexually-transmitted infections being introduced into Northern Territory indigenous communities has to be avoided at all costs.

I and my colleagues on this side of the House support the sentiment of the minister's motion. We know that a whole-of-government approach to deterring illegal fishermen must be adopted to ensure the safety and security of the Northern Territory, and the whole of Australia. However, there is no doubt that the minister's reluctance today to work with the amendments that were proposed by the Country Liberal Party to have a bipartisan approach only confirms to me that this motion by the minister is more about grandstanding than resolving this very serious issue.

I would like the minister to also tell me - and perhaps this is already been answered - whether he has even bothered to talk to the newly-appointed federal fisheries minister. It would appear that he has not, but I would like him to confirm whether he had bothered to do that before introducing this motion. I am very disappointed but that does not change my and my colleagues' commitment to ensuring everything is done to protect our northern waters. We will continue to lobby the federal fisheries minister, Eric Abetz, who, I believe, has a much more constructive approach than his predecessor in addressing the best outcomes for the Northern Territory.

I ask you again, minister, to seriously consider these amendments, which will make your meeting, when you do finally meet with the federal minister, a far more conciliatory meeting than I believe you are portraying to him right now.

**Ms SCRYMGOUR (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage):** Madam Speaker, I speak in support of the minister's motion on illegal foreign fishing incursions in northern Australia. I feel this issue is tied up with a broader issue of Australia's coastal security generally, and takes in problems of how Australia can effectively exercise sovereignty, and the immigration laws and processes that go with it over such a vast and thinly populated northern coastline.

The increased concern about coastal security just happens to coincide with the national debate that has been aggressively escalated by critics of Aboriginal land rights about the viability of Aboriginal communities. It is high time that these two debates were joined together. When it comes to the extensive northern coastline and my electorate of Arafura comprising both the coastline around various islands, including the Tiwi Islands, and the coastline across the top of Cobourg Peninsula and western Arnhem Land, the right policy for the Commonwealth government is a no-brainer: support the rights of coastal Aboriginal people so that they can continue to guard our northern frontier.

No matter what pundits may think or say in the colder southern parts of this continent, the political reality in our region, the southern Asian region, is that the occupation and ownership of Top End coastal land and waters by Aboriginal people is accorded legitimacy and respect. That legitimacy and respect itself translates into a more effective assertion of Australia's assertion of sovereignty along our northern border. Australia as a nation desperately needs to retain and, indeed, increase the Aboriginal population resident at strategic locations at or near its northern coastline. Our government has provided more funding and resources to the indigenous ranger programs, but additional resources still needs to be pumped into all conventional government services. That needs to be done to ensure that the many coastal communities can continue as viable and functional social units and their people stay where they are and continue to look after the surrounding coastal country and sea areas.

Additional special funding needs to be allocated to enable the local Aboriginal rangers to carry out the coastal surveillance and security enforcement that they are able to undertake more cost effectively than any mainstream government agency or outside contractor. The additional special funding should come from the Commonwealth government because the Commonwealth has ultimate constitutional responsibility for protecting and policing Australia's coastal waters.

What we are experiencing now in the Top End is the increasingly brazen plundering of our marine resources by well organised, illegal fishing operations, sometimes using quite technologically sophisticated boats and equipment. Even when the crews of the boats are made up of poor Indonesian seamen, it is now well established that the owners of the vessels and the illegal enterprise financiers are established businessmen often from third countries and with organised crime connections.

Conventional coastline protection measures on behalf of the Commonwealth consist of air surveillance carried out by the Australian Customs Service and/or independent contractors acting on its behalf; and interception and interdiction by Customs and the Royal Australian Navy when a target vessel can be located quickly enough within Australian waters. These conventional measures have proven insufficient on their own to deal with the current threat to Top End marine security, and to our precious fish stocks and other marine resources.

By way of example of the outstanding job being performed by the indigenous sea rangers, I would like to say a few words about the Maningrida-based Djelk Rangers, and drawing on information

provided in an interview with Djelk ranger, Victor Rostron, which was published in the December 2005 issue of the Maningrida *Djurrung*. The Djelk Rangers cover both land and sea with a primary mission to protect and safeguard their surrounding environment, entrusted by tradition since time immemorial. There are eight sea rangers who get paid CDEP wages, topped up by Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, which auspices and facilitates the operation of the Djelk Rangers generally.

There were at least seven sightings of illegal fishing vessels off the Arnhem Land coast by Djelk Rangers throughout 2005. Two of the boats detained were destroyed near Maningrida; others were taken to Darwin by Customs. The boat associated with the seventh sight was not apprehended. No occupants were sighted when the boat was first spotted and it was evident that they already had gone ashore. The Australian Customs Service was notified but, by the time the Australian Customs Service responded to the notification, the boat had disappeared. Long-lines and gill nets found on the vessels that were detained indicate the illegal fishermen are mainly trying to catch shark. The sea rangers have been patrolling regularly, almost everyday using Bawinanga's elderly 1958 model Cessna and two boats. More funding is needed to fund the ongoing surveillance and patrolling operations of the Djelk Sea Rangers and funding to upgrade the aerial surveillance operations would be a particularly sound investment.

However, even more important is the need to recognise the vital role and function that the sea rangers are carrying out for Australia as a whole by firstly increasing the number of sea rangers on the job and ensuring that, after achieving their threshold training and qualifications - all of the current sea rangers at Maningrida have attended and passed relevant mainstream accredited courses - they are all paid a proper salary and not just CDEP work for the dole equivalent; and secondly, effectively resourcing the Djelk Rangers and all ranger groups to enable them to undertake a range of duties associated with border security, quarantine and biosecurity risks and the detection of fisheries offenders and other illegal activity.

The rangers have much to offer Customs and Coastwatch as a supplementary service. They are superior to the official agencies at detecting foreign fishing vessels that evade detection by radar and make it to their mainland hiding places. They have a vested interest in retrieving illegal nets and long-lines left behind when the vessels abscond or are apprehended. This fishing gear continues to kill fish for a long time. They are capable of conveying Customs, Quarantine and Immigration officers to the scene of incursions much more quickly and at a fraction of the cost

currently outlaid by Australian government on patrol boats. Additionally, they can assist the official agencies to apprehend and transport the crews of illegal vessels. They are able to manage forfeited vessels in accordance with Customs and Quarantine requirements until they are removed or destroyed. The rangers have a natural role in providing a cost-effective alternative to the current arrangements. They should be acknowledged, provided with appropriate training and equipment, and given mainstream equivalent incomes in recognition of the valuable role that they are playing.

I thank the minister for bring forward this motion on a matter that is in the national interest and not just for the Northern Territory. I wish you well and will give you every support in your endeavours to call upon on the federal minister to address this matter urgently and seriously with the attention that it deserves.

**Mr WARREN (Goyder):** Madam Speaker, as chair of the Sessional Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development which has been given the task of investigating the impacts of invasive species, I am very interested in the potential for illegal fishermen to introduce exotic pests and diseases into Australia.

The fact that we know that illegal fisherman are not only stealing our fish stocks, but they now have began to make illegal landfall on the Australian mainland, and even establish makeshift campsites in remote areas along our vast coastline, is a very disturbing development indeed. What diseases and pests are they likely to be introducing, or even worse, what diseases and pests have already been introduced? If this makes you feel a bit like someone whose house has been broken into and treasured items stolen and your house despoiled, or if you are feeling even a little violated by what these illegal fishermen are doing, then you have truly grasped the enormity of the problem. You should be angry.

As the minister reported, we know these illegal fishing vessels are sometimes infested with exotic insects such as spiders, cockroaches, mosquitoes as well as rodents. They also carried meats and vegetables and if that is not concern enough, black striped mussels and Asian green lipped mussels have been detected on their hulls. Larger ice boats could even be carrying contaminated bilge and ballast water. Just when you think it cannot get any worse, there are reports that some of these illegal fishing vessels are carrying chickens, birds, monkeys and even cats and dogs.

To put this risk into perspective, it is now widely agreed that invasive pests and diseases are the No 1 threat to our biodiversity, now ahead of even land clearing. Equally as worrying is the fact that

the negative economic impact of invasive pests and diseases is also extremely high - so high that it is estimated that the cost of production losses and control measures associated with weeds alone has been calculated as \$4.1bn per year to the Australian economy, while the economic impact of the pest vertebrate animals is estimated at \$720m per year. Furthermore, plant diseases and invertebrate pests cost us \$2bn per year, while animal disease invertebrate pests cost up to \$1.2bn per year. These figures are based on those invasive pests that are here now. Clearly, the risks associated with continued incursions of invasive species could be absolutely catastrophic to our environment and economy.

Unfortunately, the landfall of illegal fishermen is one of the biggest risks to breaching our strict quarantine regime. Equally as hazardous to our environment is towing these boats to Darwin Harbour and keeping them moored here until the courts have processed the illegal fishermen and the boats are ultimately destroyed. While these boats are checked prior to entry into Darwin Harbour, there is still the potential for some of these exotic hitchhiker pests to escape and wreak havoc, especially the marine invaders such as the black striped mussel and the Asian green lipped mussel. Not only is there considerable costs associated with collecting and towing these boats to Darwin, but we are also potentially opening ourselves to inadvertently assisting the introduction of these invasive pests. Even when they are burnt close to shore, there is still the potential for the marine pests which live below water to survive and spread.

This issue is not restricted to the coastline of the Northern Territory; this is a national issue. Marine pests can incur huge costs to the nation by impacting on the human health, fisheries, aquaculture, shipping and ports, tourism, environmental values, biodiversity and the health of ecosystems overall. The cost of eradication and control of outbreaks can run into millions, if not billions. Therefore, prevention is the most effective long-term method of eliminating or minimising the risks associated with introduced species, whether land- or water-based. Once introduced to an area, marine pests often thrive as they do not have any predators or competitors in their new environment.

Marine pests have been introduced to Australia and moved around Australia or trans-located by a variety of human and natural means. The most common modes of transport for marine pests include ballast water carried by large boats and ships to ensure their stability and structural integrity; bio-fouling, where marine organisms attach to objects immersed in marine water such as boat hulls, ropes, anchors and other marine equipment; and, to a lesser extent, aquaculture

operations, aquarium imports, marine debris and ocean current movements.

Various marine species of plants and animals have become marine pests across the world. In the Australian marine environment introduced exotic crabs, mussels, sea stars and seaweeds have become marine pests. In the Northern Territory, the Asian green lipped mussel and the black striped mussel are of major concern as potential invasive species that can be carried on the hulls of boats entering Northern Territory waters from overseas. The Asian green lipped mussel, or *Perna viridis*, was recently found in Darwin Harbour and is currently under containment and eradication. Other outbreaks of Asian green lipped mussels found in 1991, 1999 and 2001 have successfully been eradicated.

The black striped mussel, or *Mytilopsis sallei*, was detected in plague proportions in Darwin's marinas in March 1999. The threat to commercial and recreational fishing, aquaculture, tourism and port industries of northern Australia was so great that \$2.2m was spent on eradicating this particularly nasty marine pest. The small bivalve is a native of tropical and sub-tropical western Atlantic waters extending from the Gulf of Mexico to Columbia. It has been classified as a serious pest as a result of its potential to cause significant economic and environmental damage, principally due to massive fouling of marine infrastructure. It is believed to have invaded Fiji prior to 1900, India in 1967 where it has cost the Indian Navy many millions of dollars and, in the 1970s, it made its way to Japan and Taiwan, and in the 1980s to Hong Kong.

The ability of the black striped mussel to settle on almost any surface and suffocate almost all other marine life is of great concern to our fishing, aquaculture, tourism, defence and port industries, as well as our marine ecosystems, which I explained before. Stormwater drains and seawater intakes from industrial plants and marine facilities are also vulnerable to fouling by this mussel. In its preferred inshore, low estuarine habits introduced populations of black striped mussel are capable of forming mats up to 10 cm to 15 cm thick - you can imagine how devastating these marine invaders can be. A recent population reported on 30 September 2005 in Darwin Harbour on a detained foreign fishing vessel boat was contained and removed. Fortunately, no outbreak occurred.

As I mentioned before, the populations found in Darwin Harbour in 1999 were successfully eradicated. The success was due to the rapid response by Northern Territory Fisheries staff, the Northern Territory government and the Commonwealth government. Some 200 people were involved in the operation, which cost in

excess of \$2.2m. Now, \$2.2m is definitely not a huge amount when compared to the cost of eradication if the species had become established in the Northern Territory. That figure could have blown out significantly. For commercial operators, the cost of controlling the black striped mussel has the potential to put them out of business. Black striped mussel populations on boat hulls can increase drag, reduce speed and damage the hull's surface. The mussels are known to clog the cooling water intake of both engines, causing serious overheating and damage to motors.

In the United States, a marine relative of the black striped mussel, the zebra mussel - which has many similar traits to the black striped mussel - has cost the United States \$US600m in control remediation since it was introduced. We can hardly afford that sort of expense here, but it could happen if we do not take the right precautions.

The exact number of marine species that have been introduced to Australia is unknown. Australian scientists have identified over 129 exotic marine species, and 209 marine species of unknown origin in Australian waters. Consequently, there is a great potential for illegal fishing boats coming to Australian waters from South-East Asia to carry invasive marine pests. There are many similarities between our climates. Also, there are a number of species there like the black striped and the Asian green lipped mussel that have high rates of quick reproduction. It should also be noted that although foreign fishing ice vessels have really fast transit periods, they spend a lot of time in port at home; time enough for species like the black striped mussel or Asian green lipped mussel to cultivate on their hulls before travelling illegally into Northern Territory waters.

For the record, I would like to praise the efforts of those involved in the vessel inspection program run by the Aquatic Pests Management team in the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines. They have the runs on the board, and have done an excellent job continuing to examine international vessels intending to enter Darwin marinas, and any apprehended illegal fishing vessels for the presence of aquatic pests. The protocol has now intercepted over 40 potential pests. The most recent detection is that of the Asian green lipped mussel on the hull of an apprehended Indonesian fishing vessel on 28 October 2005, just one month after the detection of the black striped mussel on the propeller of another apprehended illegal fishing vessel.

Fortunately, no additional marine pests have been detected during marine pest surveillance activities in Bynoe, Darwin and Gove Harbours,

the Aspley Strait between the Tiwi Islands, Raffles Bay on Cobourg Peninsula, and Millner Bay on Groote Eylandt. As part of the vessel inspection program carried out by the Aquatic Pest Management Team in Fisheries, the department has inspected over 700 vessels and quarantined 37 vessels suspected of being fouled with aquatic pests, including five apprehended illegal fishing vessels fouled with the highly invasive black striped mussel or Asian green lipped mussel.

The three most recent potential marine pest interceptions were reported by departmental officers undertaking inspections of vessels deemed to be of high risk. The detection of the black striped mussel and Asian green lipped mussels on apprehended illegal fishing vessels during September and October 2005 resulted in the completion of an extensive dive survey and deployment of additional settlement traps to monitor marine fouling communities in Darwin Harbour. I can pleasingly report to parliament neither black striped nor Asian green lipped mussels have been detected. However, we must continue to be vigilant and monitoring will continue.

As the minister outlined in his speech, it is imperative that a summit take place between relevant ministers in each jurisdiction, the representative of affected stakeholders, to consider Team Australia's action plan to combat illegal foreign fishing and associated risks, particularly to our biosecurity. However, I do take exception to the 'do nothing', whinge, opposition claim that we are not serious about this issue. We are very serious about this problem and that is why the minister has put this important motion on the parliamentary agenda.

Madam Speaker, I commend this motion as moved by the minister.

Debate suspended until after Question Time.

**MOTION**  
**Illegal Fishing Incursions in**  
**Northern Territory Waters**

Continued from earlier this day.

**Dr LIM (Greatorex):** Madam Speaker, I did not intend to speak to this motion, relying on our opposition spokesperson to do this. However, after having heard the member for Goyder carry on just before the lunch recess, I need to say something to try to at least square up what the government has tried to portray.

The issue is about cooperation between governments - the Northern Territory government and the federal government. We have heard from the Leader of the Opposition that she has been in

contact with the new federal minister for fisheries and he is quite positive towards actions that will be undertaken on behalf of the Northern Territory. For the member for Goyder to say: 'Oh, this is all game playing', well, the game playing is by the government and the minister trying to grandstand. If we work cooperatively with the federal government, I am sure we will get much better results.

Three-quarters of the member for Goyder's speech was about the black striped mussel. For goodness sake, who found it, who treated it, who spent the money to fix up Cullen Bay and the surrounding beachfronts? The member for Goyder praised the program, and so he should. It was decisive action on the part of the government under the stewardship of minister Mick Palmer at the time, and the pest was got rid of very quickly. Without a doubt, foreign ship incursions into Northern Territory waters will bring the risk of introduction of foreign pests of whatever kind - whether it be from marine to aerial, to the insects and parasites, whether brought in by humans or domesticated animals that are on board these boats.

When you look at the amendments put by the Leader of the Opposition against what the government has put together, the sentiments are almost the same. Paragraphs (a) and (b) of the motion are exactly the same. We are asking the government not to be so adversarial. We say, let us ask the federal government to assist in funding of programs such as the expansion of the indigenous marine ranger program throughout northern Australia as a matter of urgency. That is a very good way to compromise and soften our approach to the federal government. We have already had a verbal commitment from the new minister that he will do more to assist the Northern Territory, and we should take this man on his word that he will deliver.

Paragraph (d) of the minister's motion calls upon the Prime Minister to personally convene an urgent summit. Yes, this is a very important issue. However, I suggest to you that the Prime Minister has many more pressing things to do than to personally convene an urgent summit to deal with foreign ship incursions into Northern Territory waters. I believe the Leader of the Opposition's amended motion provides a very strong and appropriate vehicle to ensure that a whole-of-government plan can be developed to address the issue of foreign ship incursions into northern Australian waters.

I strongly believe that the amended motion can achieve a much stronger and positive response from the new minister. It would have bipartisan support from this Assembly; the opposition would vote with the government on the amended motion.

What stronger message can you send to the federal government than the unanimous voice of this Assembly? Of course, the Northern Territory government has the numbers in this Chamber and can push through whatever it likes. It can push through its motion, but it will lose the impact of the unanimous vote of this Assembly. The minister's closing paragraph in his motion moves that the Office of the Speaker forward the terms of this motion to both Houses of the Commonwealth parliament. However, he will not be able to include the words 'the unanimous support of this House' and that will be such a pity.

We have said right from the very beginning that we would like to support you on this because it is important. However, you are doing it in such an adversarial way that you are going to defeat the very purpose you have set out to achieve. I strongly suggest that we should have a compromise. There is nothing to lose by accepting the amended version of your motion. You will lose nothing from it, but you will gain total support from the opposition. You can then write to the federal parliament and say you have a unanimous decision from this House; that it is important for both Houses of the federal parliament to recognise that this is a very major issue that we are facing. Let us follow what the Western Australian government is doing. It is doing it in a very cooperative way – so can we.

**Mr HENDERSON (Police, Fire and Emergency Services):** Madam Speaker, I advise that the government will not be supporting the opposition's amendments. I find it quite extraordinary that the opposition would not support the original motion. I have made some notes about some of the comments opposition members have made.

The member for Greatorex talked about the motion being adversarial. I do not see anything adversarial at all in the motion. When you read that motion, it is pretty hard to find what is adversarial about it. It is just that the CLP really now has totally demonstrated, if it needed to, that it is no longer just an apologist for the federal government in Canberra. It is no longer just a puppet of the federal government in Canberra. When Julian McGauran left the National Party to join the Liberal Party, in the discussion about whether the National Party should maintain their party status in the Senate and the additional funding that goes with it, one of the Senators said: 'Well, the CLP is a branch of the National Party in the Northern Territory ...

**Mrs Miller:** Can you tell me what this has to do with this discussion?

**Mr HENDERSON:** Now we have seen that their own Senator, Nigel Scullion, is actually the National Party Whip.

**Dr LIM:** A point of order, Madam Speaker! I believe the minister has to be pulled up. He is digressing completely away from the topic in discussion. What does it have to do with Nigel Scullion and him sitting with the National Party? Absolutely nothing. We are talking about this motion. What does it have to do with that? He should withdraw and get on with the debate.

**Madam SPEAKER:** There is no point of order. However, minister, please come to the point very quickly.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Madam Speaker, to adhere to your ruling I will come to the point very quickly because it is very pertinent.

The member for Katherine, who is the opposition spokesperson for fisheries, spent about 10 minutes quoting from Senator Scullion's speech to the Senate the other day. So, to say what does Scullion have to do with this, the member for Greatorex obviously did not listen to what the member for Katherine was talking about.

The issue here is that the CLP amendments totally water down to the point that their proposed motion is nothing more than just bowing to their partners in the federal Coalition in Canberra. The CLP is nothing more than a pale shadow of its former self; it is no longer the proud and independent Territory party. It is just a branch of the National Party up here in the Northern Territory and apologists for the federal government in Canberra.

The Opposition Leader was totally patronising in her comments. She talked about the motion being about politics, not outcomes and action. The issue about why should the Prime Minister get involved in all of this, you should leave to the new Fisheries minister - my colleague, the fisheries minister, will show in terms of comments from the new Fisheries minister that this is a whole-of-government issue. There are many government agencies that are part of our border protection regime in Australia, and I will run through them: Customs, Fisheries, Agriculture and Forestry, Defence, Coastwatch, Immigration, Foreign Affairs, and Health. There needs to be a whole-of-government approach.

If the security, and the longevity and the health, not only of our national fishery, but also the biosecurity of Australia, is something the Prime Minister should not concern himself with, I do not know who should. My colleague showed the map of the increasing and alarmingly increased level of incursions - and those are the ones we know

about. If you think that you know of every one, there are probably four or five that you do not know about. That threat, not only to our fishery and the sustainability of our fishery, but the biosecurity of Australia, is an extraordinary threat.

Just ponder the thought of the expense and all the checking you go through every time you disembark an international flight, every time cargo is unloaded at an international port. Look at the expense and thoroughness of the quarantine checking there. What has been spent in protecting our biosecurity from incursions of foreign fishing vessels off the coast of the Northern Territory, northern Queensland, and north-west Australia is really way out of balance.

The Commonwealth government has a \$13bn surplus. A call to spend a tiny fraction of that surplus on supporting the marine ranger program through the Territory, I would have thought, would have been something the opposition could have supported very easily. But no, they are doing the bidding of their masters in Canberra. One of them now is the National Party Whip and we cannot possibly rock the boat in terms of what is happening in Canberra, such is the puppet that the CLP has now become.

We will not be supporting that. It is a watered down motion. For 18 months, my colleague has been writing to federal ministers and not receiving a reply. It is good to hear that he is meeting with Senator Abetz next week. Hopefully, we can progress the matter on the strength of the motion that we are putting here. The government will not be accepting the CLP opposition amendments and we will be progressing our original motion as debated.

**Mr VATSKALIS (Primary Industry and Fisheries):** Madam Speaker, I agree with my colleague, the member for Wanguri, that the government is not accepting the amendments of the opposition. I have to say I am perplexed and surprised that after three years of complete silence, all of a sudden they become very vocal on this issue. Not vocal in asking to do something about illegal fishing, but vocal in protecting a federal government minister.

Look how serious they are, Madam Speaker. The Leader of the Opposition put out a media release yesterday. She says in the media release: 'I spoke to Senator Abetz this morning on the telephone after the NT Fisheries minister Kon Vatskalis gave notice of a motion yesterday in the Legislative Assembly'. In three years she did not pick up a phone to speak to Macdonald. In three years she did not pick up a phone to speak to anybody because there was no issue for them.

On the contrary, on some occasions they accused Australian fishers of overfishing the shark stocks; it was their fault. Then she complains that I have been attacking the federal government for months over this. Of course I was attacking the federal government. It is an important issue - not just for the Northern Territory, or Western Australia, or Queensland, but for the whole of Australia.

We have 8000 boats coming down into our waters fishing Australian resources, and out of the 8000 boats only 400 are apprehended, arrested or brought into port. It is a significant issue. Not only for the fisheries, but also for primary industry, biosecurity of plant diseases, animal diseases, human diseases, foreign invasion, terrorism, drugs, guns, illegal migration, a threat to our national sovereignty. The Leader of the Opposition is complaining that this motion is adversarial. No, it is not. It calls a spade a spade. It says things the way they are. What we are asking of the federal government is to finally get serious and do something about it now. We cannot afford to wait another month, another year; it will be too late.

From 2000 to 2004, we have seen a significant increase of foreign incursions. In 2000, most of the boats were around the sea boundaries between us and Indonesia and Timor. In 2004, they are in Maningrida, Borrooloola, Groote Eylandt, and outside Darwin. This is a national issue. The member from Katherine asks: 'What are Territory police doing about it?' The Territory police cannot do much about it because entering Australia illegally is an immigration issue; coming into Australia without a permit is a quarantine issue; and coming into Australia near some petroleum resource installation is a Defence Force issue. It is very easy to complain about the Territory police not arresting these fishermen. Hello! They sail 400 miles from our borders to Borrooloola and you expect the Territory police to apprehend and arrest these people? For what? For federal offences? We have no authority to do so, and we cannot do so, and the federal government has admitted that.

The member for Greatorex said that the Prime Minister has more important things to do than convene a meeting. Really? So 8000 boats come into Australia illegally, breaking all the laws about immigration, about sovereignty, about quarantine, and it has nothing to do with the Prime Minister? What does he expect to happen before he intervenes? For somebody to come here with a boat and blow up the Darwin Harbour or the Bayu-Undan facility before he calls to convene a meeting? The incursion of these illegal boats coming from Indonesia to anywhere in Australia is a very important issue and the Australian Prime Minister has an obligation to do something about it.

The member for Katherine was accusing the Indonesian government of allowing foreign vessels to fish their stock out of existence in Indonesia so the Indonesian fishermen get to come down to Australia. I was in Jakarta when Freddy Numberi, the Indonesian Minister for Maritime Affairs and Fisheries said to me that Indonesia was unable to patrol all the waters in the archipelago. It was at the same time that a Chinese boat was caught illegally fishing in Indonesian waters and, when it tried to escape, the Indonesian Navy blasted it out of the water. The Indonesians are unable to patrol their waters in the same way the East Timorese are unable to patrol their waters and to control the illegal fishing in the area. It is illegal fishers from Taiwan, Thailand, and China who plunder the resources around these areas. Then you have organised crime syndicates targeting shark fin for its high value. I have seen this happen before. At Jakarta airport the shark fin was \$US1000/kg, which is a significant amount of money for any Indonesian person. That is why these crime syndicates finance the construction of boats and the trip; they reap huge benefits from illegal shark fin.

The member for Greatorex said: 'If you accept our amendments you would have our support'. Does this translated to: if you do not get your amendments, you are not going to support our motion? I find it unbelievable that you are prepared to play politics with such an important issue: 'If you do not support our amendments, we are not going to work with you'. It is about time you started thinking first about Territorians, about Australians, and then politics.

You think that my motion is tough on the federal government. Yes, it is, and quite rightly so. They have not done much in the past three years. It is about time they lifted their game to do something. You think that my motion is very harsh on the federal fisheries minister because we are trying to take the responsibility from him and give it to the Prime Minister. He said on the ABC program *AM* on 4 February that it is a whole-of-government approach. It should not be only his responsibility. He even said that he supports a proposal from the Minister for Justice and Customs to deal with illegal fishermen under his portfolios. It looks like Senator Eric Abetz clearly understands the issue, that it is not only a fishing issue, that it is a whole-of-government issue. It involves other departments and he promotes a whole-of-government approach. The only people who do not understand that is the opposition here in the Northern Territory.

Madam Speaker, I am not going to speak for long because I responded during Question Time, and I have been on the record many times talking about illegal fishing. I have been accused by the previous fisheries minister of creating problems

that were really petty. They are not petty for us. They were not so petty because when I spoke to my counterpart in Western Australia, Jon Ford, he was incensed about the unwillingness of the federal government to do anything about illegal fishermen. I have also spoken to the minister for fisheries in Queensland and he is willing to come on board.

We all ask for a coordinated approach, a Team Australia approach, so we can get together and do something. We offer cooperation. Three Labor states are prepared to work with the Liberal federal government because we see this as an enormous issue. Most of us would have left parliament in the next 10 to 20 years. These people, if we do not stop them now, will not leave any fishing resources for Australians in the next 10 or 20 years.

I call upon the federal government to do something. I believe the Prime Minister is the most appropriate person to convene a meeting for this important issue, in participation with the three ministers in Queensland, Northern Territory and Western Australia, and why not the minister from East Timor and Indonesia? This is not only a northern Australian issue, this is a regional issue and we have to do something about it.

I have been attacking the federal government for a long time because we have been writing to the previous federal minister for fisheries for a long time. My predecessor, the member for Johnston, wrote to him in 2003 and, since I became the minister for fisheries in December 2004, I have been writing a letter nearly every second or third month. That is the only minister with whom we have such an extensive exchange of correspondence. Actually, I have to say one-way correspondence, because it went only from us, with never anything from him.

I also wrote to Eric Abetz when he became the fisheries minister. I was very pleased to receive a phone call from Eric Abetz, and pleased because he was very honest and very genuine. He said he understands how we feel because he comes from Tasmania which is far way from Canberra, and many times Canberra ignores Tasmania like it ignores the Northern Territory. On top of that, he understands because there is illegal fishing in the southern ocean for the Patagonian toothfish, something similar to us. However, we want the same response here in the northern waters as the federal government has done in southern waters. They have deployed Customs vessels with machine guns on them, and regular Australian Navy frigates to chase away the illegal fisherman and, on occasion, sail for 6000 miles before they arrest them and bring them back.

We expect the same treatment. We are Australian citizens. We are not arguing about

Territory waters or a small jurisdiction here. We are talking about the northern waters that extend from Cairns all the way around to Broome. These are the most productive waters in Australia and that is the reason why these people are coming from Indonesia and other places to poach our resources. At the moment, they are taking 5000 to 25 000 tonnes of shark every year only for the fins. Now we see them starting to target reef fish. There is a boat out there with 640 tonnes of reef fish; there is no paperwork for 270 tonnes. Customs and the Navy are investigating. Hopefully, the arrest and apprehension of that boat and, possibly, any conviction that will follow a successful investigation, will become a lesson for these people who think Australia is open slather for fishing and they can do whatever they like because the government in Australia does not take any notice, and does not give a hoot.

Madam Speaker, I strongly urge my colleagues on both sides of the House to support this motion because we have a responsibility to Territorians, to the fishing industry in the Territory and in northern Australia, and to all Australians. This resource does not belong to Territorians, Western Australians, or to people from Queensland. It belongs to all Australians from the north to the south, from east to the west.

**Madam SPEAKER:** Honourable members, there are currently two questions before the Chair: the original motion as proposed by the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries, and an amended motion as proposed by the Leader of the Opposition. I will put the question relating to the amended motion first.

Amendment negatived.

**Madam SPEAKER:** The question now is that the original motion as proposed by the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

#### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT Asian Relations and Trade**

**Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister):** Madam Speaker, this afternoon I deliver an important statement on the direction we are taking in the Asian Relations and Trade portfolio. You will recall that I announced new administrative arrangements in July last year, which included merging the Asian Relations and Trade responsibilities of the old Department of Business, Industry and Resource Development with the AustralAsia Trade Route responsibilities of the Department of Chief Minister into the new Trade and Major Projects Division of my department. This statement is my first opportunity to brief and update the House following that decision.

Territorians have always strongly supported their government building closer ties with our near neighbours, and in helping Territory business develop new trading opportunities in the region. This is not surprising; Territorians clearly understand that we sit between two great spheres of influence - the rest of Australia and South-East Asia. They are very aware of the opportunities that this presents. There is no doubt that the Northern Territory is warmly received and well respected in many parts of South-East Asia as a result of those efforts. I particularly acknowledge the efforts of the previous minister, the member for Wanguri, someone I have come to learn is both well known and highly regarded in the region.

The case behind our continued commitment to Asia is well known, but it is also important to restate the rationale for our continued engagement wherever we can. First and foremost, it is the region in which we live. Asia is within our sphere of interest, both culturally and economically, and what happens in Asia has, and will continue to have, an effect here in the Northern Territory. Together with our northern neighbours, we therefore share a strong interest in the stability and prosperity of our region.

Next, it is important to understand and engage with your friends and neighbours. Natural regional blocs, such as the one in which we sit, rely on good relations between communities and an understanding of the laws, cultures and aspirations of one's neighbours. What should not be lost in any discussion on Asian relations is the natural wealth we enjoy with a diverse and vibrant expatriate community: some 60 different nationalities and 70 ethnic groups, all with natural linkages back to family and community in their home countries. Asia is also the most exciting and rapidly developing economic region in the world. There is little doubt it will be the region of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Association of South-East Asian Nations, ASEAN, sits on our doorstep and has a population of some five hundred million, a combined gross domestic product of \$US737bn and total trade of \$US720bn. We have significant trade in Asia now that will grow in years to come. The alignment of the Territory economy to the region will deliver expanding two-way trade and, importantly, jobs for Territorians today and into the future.

An internationally-orientated community and economy is essential to develop the Northern Territory and prepare Territorians for life in a globalised economy. We are fast becoming a world without traditional borders and we need to be part of it.

We have had some major investment in the Northern Territory over the last few years – the

\$1.3bn development of the Alice Springs to Darwin railway; a new \$200m port at East Arm; the \$1.6bn Darwin LNG plant, which is now up and running; the \$2bn Alcan G3 expansion; the \$1.1bn Darwin City Waterfront; and the development of the Bootu Creek manganese mine, which will see over 650 000 tonnes exported annually.

Each and every one of these investments is either infrastructure for trading in our region, or facilities to create product for sale in the region. This is a clear indication that the Northern Territory economy is becoming more internationally oriented, and a key function of what we do in Asian Relations must, therefore, be to align our efforts to support the widest possible set of Territory ambitions in the region.

My government has a clearly defined path in its agenda in the Asian Relations and Trade arena. Asia is a vast region with many issues and, of course, many opportunities. It is vital we target our efforts in the region and ensure that both Territory businesses and the economy reap the maximum benefits. The work we do in the future will, therefore, be underpinned by five key principles.

The first principle is clarity of role. We will concentrate on three activities, and those are:

- nurturing and maintaining key intergovernmental relationships at both the bilateral and multilateral level;
- opening doors for business, facilitating service and merchandise trade by identifying opportunities, and focusing on market access and regulatory reform; and
- promoting the Territory in the region.

The second principle is to define our interests. I regularly receive representations on what should be our focus in the region, and rightly so. As you would expect, the advice is often based around the particular interests of the group or organisation I am talking to. This is not unexpected, but if you step back just a little, what becomes abundantly clear is that there is a wide set of dimensions to the Territory's interests in the region. They are obviously economic, but they also include the political, social, cultural and sporting dimensions, as well as a keen interest in the stability and prosperity of our region.

Importantly, on many occasions, there are unexpected linkages between these dimensions. A simple example is the athlete, or golfer, or volleyball player who travels to Darwin for the biennial Arafura Games and sees the great investment opportunities here. The same sorts of

linkages are seen across the board with international students, to tourists, and beyond. The lesson from this is to see opportunities, not in terms of boxes, but in a multi-dimensional perspective.

The third principle is that Asian Relations is a whole-of-government responsibility. I am the minister responsible for Asian Relations and Trade within government. We take the lead and have the strategic and day-to-day responsibility for the portfolio. However, any other minister travelling in the region, which I encourage, is, in effect, the Asian Relations minister for that period. This requires a sophisticated approach across government, and my department has established two across agency coordination groups focused on Asian Relations and Trade. I have also asked the chief executive of my department to elevate trade in the services sector to the highest levels, with a particular focus on tourism, aviation and international education.

The fourth principle is to continually review our commitments and relationships. The region is extremely dynamic, as the events of the recent past show. We must be ready to adapt and respond to change when it occurs. We will stick with our friends through tough times because that is what you do. We will also be reflective and remain flexible in our approach. We will not cast our strategies in stone. It may surprise some members that the Territory now has 56 agreements with countries and provinces to our north. Continual review of these agreements will be a matter of course in our Asian Relations plan.

The final principle is to work in partnership with the industry in the Territory and with key Australian government agencies, such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Austrade, and AusAID, as well as embassies and consular offices in our region. The Territory government can support industry in both existing and new markets in the Asian region. We will do this through close partnerships with industry representatives, particularly in the pastoral and resource sectors, which account for much of the Territory's merchandise exports in the region.

The partnership model is one this government values a great deal. In preparing for this statement, for example, consultations were held with key industry representatives, once again reflecting our desire to move forward together.

The scope of the Territory's activities in the Asian region is significant. Today, I provide you with an overview of the extent of those activities.

The business community in the Territory is the driver on the internal trade front with exports that are wide and diverse; the Territory's international

trade continues to grow. In 2004-05, this trade consisted of \$2.2bn of exports and almost \$2bn of imports. Non-mineral fuel exports have experienced solid growth of 21% over the last five years. The Darwin Port Corporation reports that its facilities handled a record 73% increase in total tonnage in the 2004-05 year. The total trade increased by 0.8 million tonnes to a record of 1.9 million tonnes. This is the third consecutive year in which trade has increased in line with the ongoing activity associated with the operation of the AustralAsia railway and Timor Sea oil and gas developments, including construction of the Darwin LNG facility and the 500 km Bayu-Undan subsea gas pipeline. The corporation reports that while a significant part of this record trade was associated with the subsea gas pipeline project, growth occurred in all major market sectors. This included an 8% growth in large cattle and meat exports over the previous year. In the 2004-05 year, this sector accounted for almost \$140m worth of exports and involved the shipment of more than 200 000 head of cattle.

One of our emerging new trades, containerised exports, also rose from, in the 2003-04 year, 1264 to 2165 in the 2004-05 year, representing an increase of 71% in that period. New bulk mineral trades, such as the 650 000 tonnes per annum of manganese from the Bootu Creek mine to China, and the new LNG exports to Japan, will significantly strengthen our trading performance in the coming years.

I mentioned previously that the role of Asian Relations was to align our activities in Asia with the Territory's key interests. In the trade arena, we do this by linking it to key whole-of-government strategies like *Building Stronger Territory Trade*, *NT International Trade Strategy 2002-07*, and growing our trade strategy for new transport and trade links. These strategies are supplemented by our trade support scheme, which assists Territory firms with the direct costs of breaking into export markets. So far this year, the scheme has provided \$212 000 to 44 businesses.

I mentioned earlier that my government's role is to open doors to business so that they can do business, and that is exactly what we are doing. Only last month, Hai Win Shipping announced a regular Shanghai to Darwin service following just 12 months of trial shipments into Darwin. The new Shanghai-Darwin service is a great vote of confidence in Darwin and the Australasian trade route. It is a direct result of our proactive partnership with the private sector, one that aims to build the critical mass of freight that will sustain regular shipping services in the future. The Hai Win service discharged a record 213 containers at East Arm Port last month. This can be directly attributed to the commercial negotiations held during the Global Freight

Connect Conference that we hosted in October 2005; a conference designed to promote the Australasia trade route to key industry players.

We will continue to work actively with Hai Win to grow this new trade route with a particular focus on major chemical importers from China, who supply product to the Australian and Indonesian mining industries. We will also continue our efforts to attract a Surabaya to Darwin shipping service to grow the trade route and open up opportunities for Territory businesses in Indonesia. We have been active in exploring trade opportunities with some of Indonesia's largest mining operations, and we will host an Indonesian Mining Procurement Forum in March of this year. This forum will see key purchasing staff from mining operations in Indonesia travel to Darwin to identify potential local buyers and logistics providers for the vast range of Australian purchases made by these companies.

Opportunities for our local suppliers include: tools, electrical equipment, mining chemicals, automotive spares, heavy engineering remanufacture, catering supplies, and environmental management services. The forum, which is being run in conjunction with local industry associations, will also assist in positioning Darwin as a key regional forward supply base for mining and petroleum operations. I recognise my predecessor in the role, again, the minister for DBERD, in the work he did in getting that mining facilitation going. It is a great opportunity for the Territory.

Our interests in Asia are many and varied, but all contribute to the Territory's standing in the region and our ability to achieve our broader objectives. Our international offices and formal agreements underpin our relationships with the governments of our partner countries and regions. Take Indonesia, for example. The Northern Territory, an Australian territory of around 200 000 people, has access to the highest level of government in what is the fourth most populous country in the world, and one that has a current annual growth rate of 5%.

Our strong relationship with Indonesia was shown by my being the only state or territory leader to have had the privilege of receiving a visit by the Indonesian President, His Excellency Dr Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono. I was also the only state or territory leader to attend the Anniversary of Independence celebrations in Indonesia in August last year as a guest of the President.

We are also an active member of 'BIMP-EAGA Plus One' - the Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines East ASEAN Growth Area regional economic cooperation program. The BIMP-EAGA region directly to our north has a population of

approximately 50 million and covers over 1 500 000 km<sup>2</sup>. It comprises the entire Sultanate of Brunei, the provinces of Kalimantan, Sulawesi, Maluku and West Papua in Indonesia; the states of Sabah and Sarawak and the federal territory of Labuan in Malaysia, and in the Philippines, Mindanao and the adjacent islands and the province of Palawan.

At the time of last year's BIMP-EAGA Ministers' meeting in Brunei, we launched the first phase of the new BIMP-EAGA Business Portal, an initiative of the Northern Territory, and our first project under the BIMP-EAGA SME working group. The portal is an important project that will enhance the ability of small- and medium-sized enterprises across the BIMP-EAGA region to trade in goods and services. As I speak today, this home-grown initiative is being delivered to the region by Territory government officials. Again, I pay tribute to my predecessor for the work he did on that. Well done.

Our involvement in capacity building programs with our close neighbours further strengthens our relationships and paves the way for closer economic relations. For example, in Timor-Leste, we are assisting with the development of a human resources strategy for the civil service, and improving the surveillance and control of mosquito-borne diseases including dengue and malaria, which we hope to boost with AusAID funding of up to \$1m over three years. We have also been active in the areas of fisheries management and forensic training, and in providing advice in relation to fisheries licensing, aquaculture, and tropical fruit and vegetable production.

Our cooperation with Indonesia has been very much focused on the areas of animal husbandry and fisheries, and the facilitation of trade and Customs clearance through the stationing of two Indonesian Customs officers in Darwin. Charles Darwin University and the Menzies School of Health Research are also very active in the region, particularly in the areas of forestry management, health consultancy and research and education.

Education is another of the Northern Territory's key interests in the region, from both a trade and Asian relations perspective. The recruitment of overseas students to our secondary and tertiary institutions provides the economic benefits of an export industry and is a first step in encouraging students' immediate families to visit, stay on and to invest in the Territory. Just as importantly though, educating overseas students in the Territory builds links that support the Territory's political, economic and cultural relations with the students' home countries.

Both the government and Charles Darwin University are active in encouraging students from the Asian region to study in the Territory. In addition to this, overseas exchange programs for both students and teachers are ongoing programs in our schools. Members would recall that last year I advised the House of the Northern Territory's 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Independence gift to Indonesia: vocational development training for 20 Indonesian nurses. We have been working with the university to develop this program which will commence this year. We will ensure the professional qualifications of the nurses are at a standard that would enable them to be employed as registered nurses in Australia. That is an initiative much welcomed by the Indonesian President.

Tourism is another area of significant value to the Territory from both an Asian relations and trade perspective. Tourism accounted for a significant share of the estimated \$506m in services that the Territory exported in 2004-05. We have a wonderful opportunity to tap in at the ground floor of the burgeoning new travel markets in the region. Over 180 000 Chinese visited Australia last year - an increase of 22% on the previous year - and the number of Chinese visitors to Australia is set to increase to two million per annum within the next decade. This will be assisted by the new Qantas air flights to Beijing and the new Tiger Airways flights to Darwin with newly approved links to southern China.

As minister for both Tourism and Asian Relations and Trade, promoting the Northern Territory as a desirable tourist destination is one of my highest priorities. We have representatives in Japan, Singapore and China, and are actively promoting the Northern Territory at trade shows and conferences throughout the region. We want to ensure that the promotion of the Territory as a preferred destination for tourism is a feature of all ministerial travel overseas. This includes sport tourism. The Arafura Games and major sporting events we host are opportunities to strengthen all dimensions of our relationship with Asia.

Given the importance of international education, tourism and aviation links to the Territory, I have asked the chief executive of my department to elevate the coordination of these functions to the highest level and chair regular meetings of chief executives from relevant government agencies.

A key plank of our ongoing activities in the region is the representative office arrangements we have in Jakarta, Dili and Manilla. Each office has been there for some time, and has made a contribution to the current level of engagement and trade in Indonesia, Timor-Leste and the

Philippines. In addition, further resource commitments are made through:

- financial support for the NT International Business Council of the Northern Territory Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- \$400 000 towards the Trade Support Scheme, as mentioned previously;
- government-led delegations: the next delegation is scheduled for Dubai in May with some 20 local companies looking to participate;
- support for the Indonesian pre-inspection service, a unique arrangement that involves two Indonesian Customs officers based in Darwin to speed up the export of goods and promote trade to and from the Northern Territory and Australia; and
- the Northern Territory government's Skills Migration Program.

The Territory enjoys a multi-dimensional relationship with many of the countries in the South-East Asian region. While varying in degree, the relationship embodies inter-governmental economic, social, cultural and sporting interests. I take this opportunity to quickly run through the Territory's engagement with each of these countries.

Indonesia and Timor-Leste: across the Timor Sea, those two countries are our closest neighbours. We share strong cultural ties and a keen interest in the stability and prosperity of our region. Our relationship with Indonesia is politically, economically, and culturally well developed. In many ways, Indonesia treats the NT as an elevated and privileged partner, as reflected in its central government's willingness to enter into a formal relationship agreement with the Territory.

Indonesia is the major export market for the Territory, with total exports in 2004-05 valued at \$123m, which was largely driven by live cattle. Our major areas of cooperation are in Customs, education and health. That recent initiative involving 20 Indonesian nurses is an important part of that. There is great potential for enhanced economic cooperation, particularly in the services area. The Territory has a strong relationship with Timor-Leste, particularly in the areas of health and education, and it is a priority of ours to increase cooperation with our nearest neighbour. The Territory's Timor-Leste community is in excess of 1000 strong, and Timor-Leste is a valued participant in the Territory's Arafura Games.

We enjoy good relationships with the Philippines, Brunei, and Malaysia, which are underpinned at the multilateral level through BIMP-EAGA, and at the bilateral level through relationship agreements with provinces in each of these countries.

Improved economic cooperation with these countries in both services and merchandise exports is a key focus for government. Currently, our merchandise exports are valued at approximately \$9m to the Philippines, \$11m to Brunei, and \$10m to Malaysia. Each of these countries participates in the Arafura Games and is well represented in the Territory community. Our Filipino community is the largest of all our ethnic groups and also one of the Territory's greatest sources of skilled migration and overseas students.

Of the other Asian countries identified as being of particular interest to the Northern Territory, all are well represented in our community and contribute to the Territory's migration, tourism and education numbers.

China is the Territory's largest export market, with exports totalling \$614m in 2004-05 dominated mostly by minerals. Trial shipping services between Shanghai and Darwin are promising, and will continue to be a priority focus for my government in the year ahead.

Singapore is presently the main transshipment hub for Territory exports and our second largest market with exports of \$245m in 2004-05. Singapore is also a strong participant in the Arafura Games and an important market for the Territory in terms of tourism, particularly in light of the Tiger Airways flights that now operate between Singapore and Darwin.

Exports to India were valued at approximately \$25m in 2004-05, and India is also a potential source of skilled migrants to the Northern Territory with a community that already exceeds 500 members.

Vietnam is another potential market for the Territory, particularly in terms of live cattle exports and services. The Vietnamese community is strong in the Northern Territory, exceeding 500 members.

Japan is a major export market for us, valued at \$131m in 2004-05 and set to increase substantially with recent commitments of LNG exports from Darwin LNG. Japan is also a large and mature market for Territory tourism, and there are regular exchanges of students between Japan and the Territory.

Thailand is an export market for the Northern Territory valued at approximately \$48m in 2004-05. We have a strong Thai community of around 500, and Thailand contributes to Territory tourism, migration and education.

Korea is another major export market for the Territory's oil and gas industry, with exports valued at \$130m over the last year.

The last six months highlight our strong efforts to strengthen relations with our Asian neighbours and to promote new trade links with the region. For example, just last week, minister Vatskalis was in Timor-Leste discussing our contribution to fisheries licensing with the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries. He was also present for the Senior Foreign Minister's speech to members of the National Parliament on the Treaty of Certain Maritime Matters, which was signed by Foreign Ministers of Australia and Timor-Leste governments on 12 January this year. It provides preliminary agreement on a 50:50 sharing of fiscal revenue for that portion of the Greater Sunrise field residing in previously disputed Australian waters, while at the same time setting aside the resolution of the boundary dispute for 50 years.

During the last fortnight, an official from my department and the Executive Officer of the International Business Council travelled to Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines to roll-out the web-based business network designed to link Territory businesses with businesses in the BIMP-EAGA region.

In December last year, officials from my department, in conjunction with representatives of local company, Bridge Autos, spent two weeks in Indonesia, meeting senior management of the major offshore mines promoting Darwin as a potential supply and consolidation base for those mines.

In November last year, minister Stirling promoted the Territory's investment opportunities to major financial institutions in Singapore, and officials from my department joined with FreightLink to deliver a presentation on the trade route to a major shipping conference in Thailand.

In October last year, I participated in the BIMP-EAGA ministerial meeting in Brunei, and visited Malaysia to promote new aviation links. Minister Vatskalis led an industry delegation to Indonesia to promote the live cattle export trade and, in conjunction with this, my department coordinated a trade mission to Mining Indonesia involving 12 businesses.

The Northern Territory government representatives, together with FreightLink and Toll, participated in a shipping conference to promote

the trade route, and in August last year, as I mentioned, I visited Indonesia to meet the President and participate in celebrations at the palace for Indonesia's 60 years of independence.

At the forefront of my future travel plans is a return to Indonesia, which I will visit for a range of matters including the Joint Policy Committee meeting which underpins our memorandum of understanding with Indonesia. The Mining Procurement Forum that I referred to previously will be held in Darwin next month.

In the coming months, I plan to travel to China where I will meet with key shipping and freight forwarding organisations, as well as producers and transporters of classified goods, principally for the mining sector in north Australia. Classified goods and chemicals required by the mining industry have been identified as viable base load cargo for regular shipping services between China and Darwin.

In May this year, the BIMP-EAGA Darwin Dialogue will take place. This is the opportunity we have each year to inject Northern Territory issues into the working of the BIMP-EAGA grouping. During the Darwin Dialogue this year we will partner with AusAID and other federal government agencies as part of a three-day program of meetings, briefings and events, designed to promote the Northern Territory.

Another key event for the Territory this year is the 12<sup>th</sup> annual South-East Asia Australia Offshore Conference, or SEAAOC as it is more commonly known, which will be held in Darwin from 18 to 21 June. SEAAOC promotes the development of oil, gas and related service and support industries in northern Australia and South-East Asia, and attracts more than 300 delegates from the oil and gas industry, including participants from Indonesia, Japan, Korea and China.

In the longer term, the 2007 Arafura Games will attract participants from numerous countries across Asia to the Territory in a spirit of community and good will.

At the same time, my government will ensure that the Territory is properly represented at trade shows, expos and key events in the region in a range of key areas including business, education, migration and tourism. I consider all these activities whether they involve travelling overseas or hosting overseas visitors to the Territory to be the real opportunities to showcase all that the Territory has to offer.

As Minister for Asian Relations and Trade, I encourage every Territorian to be ambassadors for the Territory, and to help build and nurture the

relationships with Asia that will support the Territory's ambitions both now and in the future.

Our commitment to developing closer ties with our northern neighbours continues to enjoy strong community support but, quite rightly, there is also an expectation that those activities deliver both immediate and long-term benefits and value to the Territory. Our ability to continue to grow our economy and provide jobs for Territorians now and into the future is very much dependant on our success in continuing to build linkages and trades in the region. Developing our profile in the Asian region is a whole-of-government responsibility that must combine ambition with discipline. The priorities I have outlined today provide the framework for doing this.

We are Australia's gateway to Asia and it is vital we also become Asia's gateway to Australia. This is our challenge. I commend this statement to the Assembly.

Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

**Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader):** Madam Speaker, on behalf of the opposition, I offer our full and sincere support to the Chief Minister and her colleagues as they continue to position the Northern Territory and make inroads into this vital region.

The Chief Minister and her colleagues will recall that the CLP was critical early in Labor's first term of the way they handled Asian Relations and Trade. I do not expect an acknowledgement but I am sure the Chief Minister and her colleagues would have been well aware of the criticism, not only by the opposition, but made by many people in the Top End. Having said that, it is important to acknowledge the good efforts that the government is making. They are building on very solid foundations which were built for many years under the CLP.

I feel certain that whilst government members will have their criticisms of CLP governments, deep within themselves they would acknowledge the excellent work done over a long period of time by a number of CLP ministers. That is why the CLP felt it was important to raise the matter in the way that it did for probably the first 18 months or two years of Labor's first term.

Therefore, it is very pleasing to read the Chief Minister's statement which is, in essence, a report card. It includes the positives but like most things in life there are challenges as well as opportunities. The importance to engage and understand your friends and neighbours is dead right and that sentence was pretty much contained in the statement.

It is appropriate for the federal government and all state and territory governments to engage with this region, but it is particularly important given the Territory's proximity to Asia. We commend the Chief Minister on this statement. It is clear that the government's efforts have been escalating over the last couple of years, and that is in everybody's interests.

The Chief Minister should know that my colleague, the member for Blain, has a great deal of experience and a great deal to offer from his knowledge in this region. My colleague, the member for Greatorex, also has a great deal to offer. I simply say to the Chief Minister that we offer whatever support we can provide in order to assist the government with making inroads in this region because it assists all Territorians. Chief Minister, you do have our support. It is bipartisan support, which is what Territorians want. We wish you well in your future endeavours.

**Mr HENDERSON (Business and Economic Development):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the Chief Minister's statement. Strengthening ties with Asia has the potential to open up significant development opportunities for the Territory and our mining, petroleum, supply and service industries. High oil, gas, gold and base metal prices are creating boom conditions in the resources sector. Eastern Indonesia is blessed with a very valuable resources sector: oil, gas, gold and base metal projects. Some of the key resource projects in eastern Indonesia include: PT Freeport's Grasberg Mine, which is a copper and gold mine; PT Newmont at Batu Hijau in Sumbawa is a gold mine; BHPB's Gag Island mines nickel; PT Weda Bay in Halmahera is a major nickel mine; BP Indonesia at Tangguh is a new gas development project; and Impex Abadi in the Timor Sea is Indonesia's major gas reservoir.

Supply and service to these projects has historically been from Singapore; however, in most cases Darwin is closer to these projects than Singapore. Given the AustralAsia trade route, the proximity of the Port of Darwin to these projects, and the enhanced supply and service capability in Darwin due to Timor Sea petroleum developments, a real opportunity exists for Territory business to undertake a far more significant supply and service role to these projects.

Officials from my department are working with officials from the Department of Chief Minister to actively pursue such opportunities. A key part of this task is raising awareness in both Jakarta and Singapore of the capabilities of Territory business in this field and the geographic proximity of Darwin and the Territory.

In support of this effort, officers from DBERD will be travelling to Jakarta to promote to several oil, gas and mining associations the use of Darwin as a supply and service support base for operations in the Timor Sea and eastern Indonesia. The goal is to encourage relevant companies to travel to Darwin to see first-hand our industrial infrastructure and meet with those business people who may be in a position to develop commercial relationships.

This is an area that I have been keen to progress for many years. Ministers and business people have travelled to Asia seeking opportunities. Given the developments of Darwin and the capacity that is being built in our industrial sector in the oil and gas industry, it is now vital that we bring those companies in eastern Indonesia which are involved in mining and resource development to Darwin to see first-hand the infrastructure that is available here, and to meet with businesses that have the capacity to support their projects. That is a key target that I have set officers from my department.

This work has been carried out in cooperation with both the Chamber of Commerce and Northern Territory Industry Capability Network. In parallel to the efforts by DBERD, trade development officials from the Department of the Chief Minister are hosting the Indonesian Mining Procurement Forum in Darwin on 20 and 21 March. That is a major initiative and one that everybody who has been involved with should be congratulated.

The aim is to promote Darwin as a supply base and consolidation point and to introduce the miners to potential suppliers. Significant effort has gone into establishing relationships with BP in Jakarta, the owner and operator of the giant LNG project at Tangguh. This 7 million tonnes per annum LNG project is only 1200 km from Darwin. Considering the North West Shelf LNG project is 1700 km from Darwin, the Darwin business community is ideally placed to offer supply and service activities to both the North West Shelf and BP Tangguh LNG projects, as well as the Wickham Point plant.

Alcan has been most impressed with the results delivered by a range of local companies which have had to compete in a global environment. I am pleased to say that they have won work and delivered quality products as required. ConocoPhillips has been so impressed with the ability of the Darwin industrial base to deliver, that they have moved 30 to 40 positions from Perth to Darwin to staff the new combined operations base for the entire Bayu-Undan/Wickham Point projects. There is no doubt that investments in infrastructure and training carried out by Darwin businesses to win work on the Wickham Point LNG project and

Alcan's G3 expansion have placed them in a much more competitive position than ever before to win work on the major projects in eastern Indonesia - a key priority, a great opportunity. I am sure we are going to start winning significant amounts of work in eastern Indonesia.

Members would be aware that all international visitors to Australia must obtain a visa to allow them to visit, regardless of whether they are visiting family here on holidays, or coming here to research, or pursue business or investment opportunities. However, members may not be aware that some of our closest neighbours in those countries with whom we have close relationships are considered by the Commonwealth as 'high risk' when it comes to obtaining visas. For nationals from these and other 'high risk' visa countries who want to visit the Territory for business purposes, my department facilitates visits through letters of support and representation to the visa processing section of the relevant Australian overseas post. We have found the department's support critical in expediting visa issues, and is welcomed and valued by clients. The officers in my department who work in this section do a great job and are very highly regarded by business and industry.

Another key priority of the government in continuing to grow this economy is to facilitate inward international investment - it was one of the key planks of the trade policy. My department, as the Northern Territory certifying body for business skills visa applications, also facilitates international business and investment into the Territory. International business people seeking to establish business in Australia must meet criteria established by the Commonwealth. However, states and territories are given some flexibility to facilitate business establishments that they consider to be of benefit to their jurisdiction. In recent times, there has been an increased interest in overseas business people seeking support of the Territory government to migrate to establish business here. The majority of these are from the South-East and east Asian regions.

With a rapid growth that China is experiencing, many people from that country are seeking international business opportunities that are complementary to their current business activities. Like Western Australia, the Territory is attractive because of its prospectivity, particularly in minerals. Australia's reputation as a clean, green food producer is also attracting the attention of the Chinese business people seeking to access quality products to satisfy the increasingly discerning palate of the burgeoning wealthy in that country. In addition to seeking to establish businesses in the Territory and access to our resources, many of these business people are also seeking to migrate. Many business migrants

establish small, valuable, export-oriented businesses injecting up to several million dollars of capital into their operations and providing jobs. In addition to their business investments and acumen, business migrants bring to the Territory valuable knowledge, understanding and networks. Their current and first-hand knowledge of business cultures and markets in their countries of birth are valuable resources to increase ...

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Will Hansard still be recording with this power outage, Clerk? I ask you to just stop the clock and pause for a moment, minister, while we check. We will just seek verification. The sun is shining, minister, for your information.

**Mr HENDERSON:** Oh, that is good. A big storm coming? Are we working or not working? I can see.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Proceed, minister.

**Mr HENDERSON:** In recent years, business migrants to the Northern Territory from Asia have invested in a range of businesses, including horticulture, aquaculture, retail, hospitality, and the pastoral industry.

Skilled migration is certainly an area that the government has put much effort into over the last 12 to 18 months, and we are really starting to reach some good dividends.

Migrants from Asia have played a vital role in the development of the Territory community and economy for decades. Family links and networks in their countries of birth offer invaluable opportunities for growth of business and trade between our regions. Last year, the Territory government launched the Northern Territory Business and Skilled Migration Strategy 2005 to 2010. The strategy was developed in consultation with business and the Territory's multicultural community groups, and recognises the importance of our ethnic communities and the role they can play in the government's efforts to attract business and skilled migrants to the Territory. Our ethnic communities in the Territory are one of the key advantages we have in developing further migration and trade between the Northern Territory and their countries of birth.

In support of the strategy, the government has increased the resources available to assist employers to access skilled workers to fill short-term skills shortages in the trades and the professions. Facilitating interaction between our business community and their international counterparts is important for the growth of Territory trade and the enhancement of our already strong social and cultural ties. My Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development

delivers a Business and Skilled Migration Service which plays an important role in fostering the economic activity that underpins the Territory's trade, facilitating inward international business investment, and assisting Territory employers to employ overseas skilled workers. These activities support our relationships in Asia and provide foundations with the potential to increase our trade with the region.

As well as alleviating skill shortages, skilled migrants increase the cultural diversity, knowledge and understanding of Territory business. Cultural knowledge is a valuable tool when negotiating with Asian business people and can improve outcomes for businesses entering the international marketplace. Many skilled workers are now being drawn from countries in South-East Asia.

In addition to facilitating overseas employee sponsorship, my department manages a range of skilled migration programs. These programs focus on young, English-speaking people who have linkages to the Northern Territory, as well as skills that are in demand here. It has been demonstrated over the years that centres which attract overseas students often enjoy consequential migration and, consequently, it is important for the Northern Territory to continue its efforts to attract international students to study here.

Asian students make up the majority of international students seeking to study in Australia. In 2005, for the first time, my department and the Charles Darwin University joined in promoting the Territory to migration and education agents, and international students in Asia. In October and November 2005, our representatives worked together in India and China to profile options for international study in the Northern Territory. Further, the Territory's policy on sponsorship under one of the skilled migration categories, the Skilled Independent Regional Visa, targets students who have completed at least two years eligible study at Charles Darwin University.

It is important to note that our skilled migration programs are not about migrants taking jobs from locals. The reality is that local businesses, like their counterparts throughout Australia, are struggling with skill shortages. It is one of our greatest challenges. We are investing heavily in training and skilling Territorians to take up the many job opportunities opening up here as our economy grows. The Business and Skilled Migration Strategy runs in conjunction with this, helping local business to meet their short-term skills requirements if that expertise is not immediately available in the Northern Territory.

I will now talk about aviation links. It is not rocket science; one of the real barriers to trade is

transport linkages and it is encouraging to see that our aviation links are getting better and stronger. Aviation provides essential links between our international trading partners and our neighbours, and to build future opportunities for ongoing growth in international markets. A key strategy to building these links is being achieved through the Northern Territory Aviation Committee, which my department chairs. This committee is implementing the NT Aviation Strategy 2004-06, and members include DBERD, the Tourist Commission, DPI and NT Airports. Key components of this strategy are to:

- foster the development of air services to and from the Northern Territory;
- foster the development of general and regional aviation services throughout the Territory;
- expand and support international air access to Darwin International Airport, and develop international access to Central Australia;
- expand and support domestic air access to Central Australia and other key destination in the Territory;
- promote Darwin as an alternative air transport hub in the region;
- strengthen key relationships with airlines;
- facilitate the growth of air freight to, from and within the Territory; and
- facilitate ground support development for air services at Northern Territory airports.

A recent success of this collaboration is the start up of Tiger Airways' Singapore to Darwin route. This has increased international passenger seat capacity into the Northern Territory by 38%, providing a huge boost to the tourism industry. It was a great announcement at the end of last year and a great Christmas present to the tourism industry in the Top End. It will also provide a boost to the viability of the Territory as an international education and business destination. For the first time we will have regular, low-cost access to Darwin to enable parents of the region to send their children to the Territory educational institutions and to visit them. Many of these parents will be business people in their own right and this will add to the network of business people in South-East Asia becoming more aware of the opportunities the Territory offers.

It also offers regular and affordable access for Darwin business people and exporters to move into Asia, to establish face-to-face relations, and secure business deals. It also makes it possible for new and existing companies to consider using Darwin as a hub for their products and personnel into South-East Asia. The strategic importance of this new link should not be underestimated.

In Central Australia, the response from Japan Airlines and the Japanese tourism wholesalers with the successful charters direct into Alice Springs has been outstanding. Passenger levels have been excellent and with more charters proposed this year, they will provide a significant contribution to the local tourism sector.

There is no doubt that the Territory has much to offer our Asian neighbours and we have much to gain from the close ties we have with these countries. This government is working to build those links in order to build our economy further, open up opportunities for local business and attract greater investment to the Territory, as well as greater numbers of migrants to the Northern Territory to grow our population.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I commend the Chief Minister on her statement.

**Mr MILLS (Blain):** Mr Deputy Speaker, the opposition also adds our support to this statement. It is an important statement. To reinforce the words of the Opposition Leader, traditionally, this area of policy that directly affects the potential growth of the Northern Territory has been undertaken on a bipartisan basis. We restate that and recommit ourselves to that end.

There is little to be gained, ultimately, in playing politics with Asian Relations and Trade. The very essence of this area of operation is the development of good bipartisan relations; relations within the community which then build a link into the regions whereby trade can occur. That needs to be clearly established as the basis upon which we proceed and make our comments.

As a disclaimer, if any of my comments appear to be critical of government, I ask you to refer to my preceding comments. The intention of this is to be constructive and not to aim for the securing of political points for their sake only. There is much more at stake. There is huge potential but a very great challenge that faces us.

Members would be well aware that it was the Territory that first realised the potential of our near neighbours, particularly Indonesia. That was at a time before the rest of the country began to talk about the engagement with the region. That was at a time when people would visit Bali but not recognise that Bali was part of an archipelago

of 200 million-plus people. I remember when I left the farm, for my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday I went to Bali. I told my friends I had gone to Indonesia. People said: 'I thought you went to Bali?' Most people did not understand that to the north of us was a nation so close and so little understood. We knew Bali was to our north, we certainly knew Singapore was to our north, and Papua New Guinea, but we really had a big gap. We did not understand much about the rest of what lay to our north.

Many Australians, particularly in the Territory, began to develop an interest and increase their knowledge of our near neighbour. Those who did discovered that the claims we make as Australians to being multicultural pale in comparison to the achievements of our near neighbour. They are multicultural in a true sense of the word: multi-faithed, multi-linguaged and multicultural going back many more years than the 200 years on which we reflect on European occupation and development of our nation. They go back hundreds of years of living together with different language groups, different kingdoms, and different stories. They are truly multicultural. The sheer size of the population is something that Australians have difficulty understanding, referring in this case specifically to Indonesia.

The immense potential of that nation, the economic wealth of it, in fact, is significant. Those who have spent time within the region have discovered that there is a middle class there of an income level that matches the middle class in our nation that exceeds the population of Australia. When we visit our near neighbour, we may go to Surabaya, or Jakarta, or Semarang, or other places in Java. We speak of Australia and they refer to our nation as rather small. When you go further and talk about the Northern Territory if Australia is small, then the Northern Territory with 200 000 people is very small.

We have to meet that challenge very honestly and ramp up our strategic policies and plans to ensure that we can punch well above weight. The Territory has done that. From the early 1980s there was the establishment of a Asian Relations and Trade Unit, the first in the country. That captured the imagination of other jurisdictions and now we see even Tasmania making great inroads into the economic potential of our neighbours to the north.

That potential which was realised and capitalised in the early phase dropped off. I will be honest, it began to fade at the same time as the economic collapse in Indonesia; that was at a time of the CLP government, and then it fell into further decline in the first period of the Labor government. However, as the economic layout of our region has changed, altered by the impact of the Chinese

economy, we are starting to see a different profile for China. The Territory, with the infrastructure that has now been put in place largely on the basis of the recognition of our need to engage our neighbour in terms of the railway and port infrastructure, is close to a very large trading population. They are now well embedded; at the same time the economy of Asia is very strong. Now is the time to realise our investment.

There are aspects of this investment that we need to call to account. There are aspects of this investment that I regret to comment are sadly deficient. If we wish to capitalise on the trade potential, we must securely understand what it means to have a relationship in the region. We have difficulty enough - let us be honest - understanding the needs of our indigenous countrymen; the different cultural imperatives in being able to deal with some of those challenges that we face, let alone understanding how to deal cross-culturally across the waters with the people to our near north. The old joke of 'if you speak two languages you are bilingual, if you speak three perhaps trilingual, if you speak one you are an Australian', is an indictment of the approach that we have taken and an approach that cannot continue if we really do want to capitalise on the potential to our near north.

There once was a stronger emphasis on the teaching of Indonesian language within our education system. The CLP's view is that this must be retained and strengthened if we are serious about long-term engagement leading to trade and economic results - an investment in education, in language. Through language, an understanding of the culture is established. Just to be able to speak some of the language of our near neighbour establishes immediately that we are prepared to work together. Only those who have embarked upon cross-cultural experience will realise that we do carry a certain amount of baggage when we are encountering discussions with people to our near north. They will be exceptionally polite, and you will get the sense that you have made some great inroads, perhaps even sign a document - walk away, and nothing will happen. Why? Because the real connection has not been made. Investment must be made in language through the primary schools into our secondary schools. Through language and understanding of culture is a capacity to develop relationships.

Secondly, there should be a re-prioritising of an investment in cross-cultural studies within the public sector. Make that available so that people are equipped to deal cross-culturally and understand how to work within the region. That is an essential part of an Asian Relations and Trade policy.

There is a great process of education that occurs within all this. I was, once again, deeply encouraged and amazed to learn when I read that marvellous book that I trust honourable members have all read - *Why Warrior Lie Down and Die* - where we are reminded of the profound, deep links between the Yolngu people and the people to our near north in Macassar for so many years before European establishment within Australia. There is a very deep and long history of connection. Those who understand Indonesian know that even some of the words on the coastline which are supposedly Aboriginal words, are also Indonesian or Malay words, which shows that there has been a long period of engagement. We have to build on that, and it gives us an opportunity to draw in our indigenous countrymen to assist us working together to develop and strengthen those links. There is much more in common in how problems are solved, how relationships are established with indigenous Territorians and many Europeans. There is an opportunity.

This leads me immediately to further engagement, not just in trade delegations and business talk - that is very important but that is the end of the process. Part of that building of the process, once again, is language, cross-cultural training, and using the arts as a means of engagement. I have been on many trips to the region and attended programs, particularly in the eastern provinces, where each of the provinces will get up and introduce themselves through arts - music and dance. People from South Sulawesi will do their dance and then show a little of their culture, and the people from West Papua, West Timor and East Timor will do the same. Then the Australians get up. They sing *Waltzing Matilda*, and they are not sure what to do. It shows that we have an opportunity for arts to be involved so that the engagement process, that relationship, is further strengthened through the recognition that art and culture is a part of our bridge building.

Moving down to very basic things, our near neighbour, West Timor, is very close and yet there is a significant problem that the former Minister for Asian Relations and Trade alluded to: the problems with travel warnings. We must continue to work to reassure people here and to assure, more importantly, those in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade that we stand together with the people of West Timor, and ask that those travel warnings be reduced so that we can increase the passage and the travel of people from the Northern Territory, the Top End particularly, to West Timor.

Education exchanges are important, and that is a two-way street. Indonesians are a good bunch of people for those of you who have met and

worked with them. They recognise that there are exchange programs on offer, and they send their kids to the Territory, once or twice a year, sometimes for a semester or a whole year, and they wonder why Territory kids are not going back there. They do not say much, but it registers - 'How come you receive ours, but we are not good enough to receive yours?' Something is conveyed in that and we need to attend to it.

There was a time when there were sporting exchanges. Yes, the Arafura Games is great. It has been going for some time, and had the primary purpose of strengthening relationships through sport, which reinforces that sport, culture, arts, language and all that is so important in the building of a relationship. However, the lower level sporting competition, the Arafura School Games that used to be conducted, was a tremendous agent for developing good relationships between our near neighbours. Do not underestimate it; those who think: 'Oh, yes, we are going to have all these sporting exchanges'. Those who have been on them know.

For example, I believe the last delegation from the Territory went to Lombok. The eastern provinces were each represented, and there was a swimming competition at the local pool. Australia did exceptionally well – or the Territory – they called us Australia because they thought they were flogging Australia, but Australia did very well in that particular competition. I remember it well. Around the pool were the parents, and with the parents were business people and people with significant connections. Through the agency of sport, and people coming together, there was discussion of trade possibilities. It happens at an informal basis. That is how it happens in the region, so we cannot underestimate how these connections are made through something like sport.

That is why soccer is so important. There is so much money behind soccer, not because of the game itself, but because of the capacity to bring people together. Soccer is a very strategic plank in any engagement program; and with the realignment now of the soccer world, which includes Australia in the Asian pool, it is something that must be capitalised upon. It starts with the ball that has been in play for some time, and I hope it eventuates this year, a soccer competition in West Timor that involves East Timor. That would be the beginning of a strategic lead, from the Territory's point of view, to begin the nation's involvement in the world of soccer in the Asian pool, and the Territory can lead the way.

Once again, on a bipartisanship approach, I am happy to contribute to that. I have done some work on that over quite a few years. It looks like we can achieve that. I am happy to be involved at

whatever level. I make myself available. But that is really important, and it will have long-term benefits.

Finally, when it comes to the education exchanges, we strike a real problem. I put this out as a challenge to our own community. I have been involved in these exchanges for a number of years. The sad fact is that, if we were to take students to West Timor, or to Java, Bali, Lombok or Sabu, or wherever, there would be people lining up to host our kids. On the other hand, when these kids front up here, it is very difficult to find host families. Everybody is busy; they are not so sure they can afford the time. They might take them for two weeks. It does send a little message too. That has been an ongoing and compounding problem, and it is a reflection, sadly, on our focus and our interest in those around us and having our doors open and inviting people in.

It comes right down to the home level and that is a fact. Ask those who are involved in the program: it is becoming increasingly difficult to get Territory families to take in exchange students or exchange teachers. That is where we really drill down to the bottom level of these policies. They may appear good; generally speaking, the statement is fine. However, when we drill right down to when it gets to that level we will really know whether we are making progress.

Remember, it is Asian relations which lead to trade. We can measure the trade part by what goes backwards and forwards across our port, and the people who come in and out through the airports. We can measure that and that will certainly be the focus of the opposition when it comes to estimates, just to check to see how we are going.

But there is the other measure. That is: are our homes open? Are we open to learn the language? Are members here learning the language of our near neighbours - Indonesian, Chinese, Malay, Vietnamese, Tagalog? Are people learning these languages?

**A member:** Yes, a few.

**Mr MILLS:** Yes, that is good. It was a rhetorical question. If we are fair dinkum about these things that is the sort of stuff we do, as once was done.

In conclusion, to reinforce that this is a high priority issue for the development of the future potential of the Territory it requires us all to work together. The Chief Minister referred to the former Minister for Asian Relations and Trade and I echo her comments. It has been a difficult task. There has been significant criticism. I wish you well. However, I wish, Chief Minister, that you could

have gone a little further and recognised that this did not start and begin with the member for Wanguri. It has had a long-term involvement and engagement. It is not just a Labor Party thing. It is a Territory thing that former governments have been actively involved in. The challenge is ongoing and you are playing your part today.

We offer our support today as I presume was offered when you were in opposition. We offer it in good faith and hope that we do continue to make progress. Mr Deputy Speaker, the opposition does support this motion.

**Mr VATSKALIS (Primary Industry and Fisheries):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I respond to the Chief Minister's statement on the direction this government is taking with the portfolio responsibility of Asia Relations and Trade. Every time I travel interstate or overseas for meetings, I carry with me a map of Australia and the South-East Asia region. You should see the surprise on the face of many people when I point out that Darwin is actually the centre of the world if you consider the South-East Asian region. Darwin is four hours flight from Adelaide or Perth. It is only one-and-a-half hours from Dili; about one-and-a-half hours from Kupang; one-and-three-quarters of an hour to Bali; three hours to Jakarta; and three-and-a-half hours to Singapore.

I also point out that for the Northern Territory to our south there are about 22 million customers including New Zealand. If you look to the north of the Northern Territory, there are about one billion potential customers. So our position in Australia is unique and our potential with regards to South-East Asia is enormous.

The Chief Minister, in her address to this House, once again outlined this government's commitment to continue the engagement with our northern neighbours. Over the past 12 months, officers within my Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines have undertaken a raft of new projects in the region, in both East Timor and Indonesia, as well as continued support for previously established initiatives throughout the Asian region.

Due to the breadth of primary industries, fisheries and mines, it is fair to say that my department has more interaction on a daily, ongoing basis in the region than most other departments. In addition to my trip to Jakarta last year, during which I talked about cattle, cooperation on fishing matters, and attended one of the biggest mining expos in the world, I have travelled to East Timor, and I will be visiting China and, hopefully, Thailand, Japan and Vietnam later this year to build further upon my department's good work.

On a personal level, I have travelled to Sarawak and Sabah, once again reinforcing existing relations and made new acquaintances with government officials, despite the fact that I was on holidays at that time.

In April 2005, my department's Director of Fisheries visited East Timor at its Fisheries minister's request to provide assistance in developing a fisheries licensing and control system for the country with the aim of building and improving the sustainability of the East Timor fishing and seafood industry. Following an application from my department, the Crawford Fund approved a cash grant of \$20 000 for the project, and a consultant was employed to develop a licensing system based on that used by the Territory. I have also approved an extra \$7000 grant to assist in implementation of the system and training of East Timor fisheries staff in the use of the new licensing system. As the Chief Minister also mentioned in her speech, I am happy to inform the House that our relationship with East Timor continues to strengthen with our involvement in capacity building programs in that country.

In October 2005, Mr Evan Needham, Senior Aquaculture Technician at the Darwin Aquaculture Centre, formed part of a Northern Territory team which again visited East Timor to assess the status of Timorese aquaculture infrastructure and technology, as well as assessing the resources which may be required to build capacity and begin the transfer of technology between the Darwin Aquaculture Centre and East Timorese fisheries staff. Capitalising on the government's partnership agreement with Charles Darwin University, a vocational education and training aquaculture course coordinator also attended, the majority of the funds again coming from the Crawford Fund. That multiskilled team was able to identify impediments to growth of the local aquaculture industry and suggest strategies that may contribute to improvements in farm production, efficiency and sustainability.

In another example of the work my department is undertaking in capacity building programs, my department hosted two senior fisheries managers from East Timor for two weeks, where those managers were able to assess the good work of our fisheries managers, scientists, and industry development staff. My department has also hosted veterinary officers from Sabah and East Timor, training them in our laboratory and testing techniques. The East Timorese staff left with a heightened understanding of how we engage with industry and together strive for long-term ecological, social and economic sustainability in all our fisheries and pastoral-related activities.

Members will also be aware that I visited East Timor last week. During my visit, I met with ministers including the Senior Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Jose Ramos Horta; the Minister for Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Senor Stanislau da Silva; and I also met with the Vice Minister for Natural Resources, Minerals and Energy Policy, Dr Jose Teixeira. During these discussions a number of issues were discussed including opportunities for future cooperation.

As a result, I have asked my department to examine a number of potential joint initiatives, and to examine the possibility of short-term scholarships for officials from the Department of Fisheries and Forestry, and also the Department of Mines to come to Darwin to attend a structured program and acquire skills and experience they can take back to East Timor to train people in their department.

While still on the topic of East Timor, officers from Primary Industry are providing technical support for many producers in the area of grain, forest and horticulture as well as working with local government officials to conduct grapevine leaf rust trials as the disease is spreading in East Timor.

The live cattle export to South-East Asia remains a valuable marketing alternative for producers in the Territory. Over 200 000 head were exported in 2005 with Indonesia accounting for 87% of the purchasers. One of our government's most important roles is to facilitate new markets for Territory cattle throughout Asia. This work is especially important in terms of the global market expanding into the region. Competition is fierce, with Argentina and Brazil seeking to expand into the region with live cattle and the supply of boxed beef. To a large degree, it is the hard ongoing work being put in by the department of Primary Industry and its officers that has allowed us to continue expanding into the region - work such as advising on pastoral production, feed lot management and safe meat handling. Add to this the recently signed protocol for live feeder buffalo to Indonesia, and it becomes clearer why the work Primary Industry is currently doing is so important for the future of our pastoral industry and economy, and for those sectors in a variety of other Asian countries.

On the other hand, by doing this work not only have we furthered our economic development here in the Territory, but we have strengthened the links and the friendship with other countries by getting officials to know each other, working together closely. We built bridges and we built very strong links that we can use in the future.

Apart from live cattle and buffalo, assistance in the horticultural field is ongoing. Some examples of the work going into this area include the

technical and quality support we give to develop vapour heat treatment for mangoes exported to Japan and, more recently, a consignment of hay and fodder products to South Korea. Technical advice and support has been provided to Indonesian banana growers in Pedang, with my department participating in a project to provide practical management options for the devastating ravages of Panama disease. This is real support for real issues affecting the supply of a staple food source in Indonesia.

I am sure members will also be interested to hear that, in the last 12 months, my Acting Executive Director of Fisheries also engaged with Indonesian government staff to represent Territory interests at the Indonesia-Australia Marine and Fisheries Bilateral Meetings. These meetings covered a diverse range of activities including shared stocks, illegal foreign fishing, and management of marine debris.

One significant outcome was the drafting of a bilateral red snapper management plan for stocks that straddle both Indonesian and Australian waters. A working group was also established on 'partnerships and coordination' which recognised the importance of the development needs of coastal communities with particular regard to training and education. Many of the issues faced by Indonesian communities are similar to those faced by regional coastal communities in the Territory. If considered in the light of alternative livelihoods, the work done by Fisheries in the Territory may have relevance to eastern Indonesia.

Staff of my department also continue to make use of a range of memorandums of understanding and corporation, including this government's memorandum of understanding with the Gondol Aquaculture Research Centre on the island of Bali, which was entered into in 2002, and under which we have identified several potential collaborative aquaculture research projects. Also vital to the servicing of this market is the memorandum of corporation with Sabah under which a meat industry officer was placed at the Sabah Meat Technology Centre to assist in meat handling and establishment of an abattoir, and the work of my department's Berrimah Veterinary Laboratory has assisted the Sabah laboratory in obtaining international accreditation.

I am also very pleased to say that recently we had an exercise for bird flu and, by coincidence, two officers from Sabah were here, and were invited to take part in the exercise. When I went to Sabah for holidays, I met officials of the department who were very pleased about the expertise and skill that these officers had acquired and brought back with them to Sabah. That

makes them feel more certain about defending Sabah from a possible bird flu epidemic.

As you have just heard, my department is engaged in both the facilitation of trade and enhancement of relations and engagement with a variety of our South-East Asian neighbours. It would be remiss of me not to mention our mining and petroleum sectors that largely underpin trade and investment links between the Northern Territory and Asia.

As most of you know, China's demand for minerals and energy is driving commodity prices and increasing export levels from Australia. My department and I receive regular inquiries from Chinese investors, traders and buyers looking for additional resources of new suppliers of commodities, especially metals. A number of Territory developments have strong Chinese connections via joint venture or off-take arrangements. A good example of this is the Bootu Creek project. My department actually encourages contact between Chinese investors and local developers and explorers. China is now an investor in the local mining industry, not just an off-taker of products. Some other mining projects in the Territory will have a strong participation of Chinese capital. In Batchelor, the proposed polymetallic mine is currently negotiating with people in China to invest heavily and to take product of that particular mine.

Japan is also significant and one of the country's major trading partners. Again, my department is working to intensify and expand relationships in that market. A good example of this work is the Japanese Trading Company ITOCHU. My department recently hosted an ITOCHU employee for a week during which time he was briefed on minerals and energy activities and opportunities in the Territory.

Building relations like this is not only good for business, it is vital for our future trade relations. The work being undertaken by all divisions of my department is not only of significant benefit to the Territory economy, but is also often instrumental in approving the lot of people in a variety of South-East Asian countries.

I hope that my comments will have opened the eyes of some to the diversity of assistance we are providing to a number of countries in South-East Asia, and to the careful and methodical development of new markets for Territory produce and commodities that are being undertaken by my department. What is really important to remember is that in Asia they do business differently. They do not rely upon faxes and letters; they rely a lot upon personal relationships. They like to meet with the people they are going to do business. They like to sit down with a drink, have dinner and

build personal relationships. I am pleased to say that, during my past trips to Indonesia, Timor and Sabah, in Sarawak I had the opportunity and the pleasure of meeting some of the local officials and elected member of parliaments. In Sabah, we have developed very good relations with the Minister for Agriculture, Abdul Rahim. In Sarawak, I had the opportunity to meet the Deputy Chief Minister, Dr George Chan, who is very interested in promoting and improving agriculture and cattle production in Sarawak. In East Timor, I met Dr Jose Soares whom I had the pleasure to meet in Darwin several times; and also the famous José Ramos-Horta whom I remember from when I was about 18 years old in Greece.

I remember Ramos-Horta speaking in the United Nations at that time for the plight of East Timor when it was just recently occupied by the Indonesians. As Ramos-Horta said to me during a function we put on to entertain some Territorian businessmen and members of the Timorese government, there were only three countries in the world which supported East Timor over the past 25 years. One of them was Portugal, because Timor was its colony; another one was Ireland, because Timor was Catholic; and the third was Greece because Greece had the Island of Cyprus which suffered a very similar misfortune to East Timor. I had the pleasure of having dinner with José Ramos-Horta and build a relationship. I was very happy to see him come to Darwin, in the same way I see many other people in countries in South-East Asia.

As I said before, Darwin, if you really look at the map, is in the centre of the universe for South-East Asians. We can be a bridge between Australia and New Zealand and South-East Asia. We are closer to South-East Asia than any other city or any other state in Australia. Even our weather is very similar to the weather in the neighbouring countries. We have to continue to build our relationship with South-East Asia which, after all, will not only assist some of these regions to improve their economic development, but it also means good business for us, because, as I said before and I will repeat again, there are one billion potential clients to our north.

**Dr LIM (Greatorex):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I will be brief in my comments. I am glad to see this statement from the Chief Minister and Minister for Asian Relations and Trade. I am pleased to see that she has been able to provide a fairly well thought out program to re-engage South-East Asia and China.

For many years in the former government, we engaged Indonesia and South-East Asia far more than any other jurisdiction has ever done. It was because of that engagement that the Northern Territory gained significant prominence with former

leaders of the nations around the area, in particular in Indonesia, the Philippines, China and Malaysia.

I am glad to see the government has come to realise the necessity for us to be engaged with our near neighbours. For much of the first term of this Labor government, the opposition tried to convince the government to spend more time in South-East Asia. It was a pity that there was significant disengagement from the area for some three to three-and-a-half years. There is no time like today and, obviously, you can always catch up. It is a pity that we lost the time though, but we can catch up. With the program that the government has developed, I have cautious hopes that things will move along.

The government needs to understand that Asians do business with people they know. That is what you need to remember - they do business with people they know. It is not just on a contract; it is more about relationships. I have always said that the department – whatever the office is now called – should be Asian and Trade Relations. It should be called Asian and Trade Relations, because it is a relationship the government needs to develop. Then, through those improved relationships, you open doors and allow the business people to move through. It is the business people who do business. As government, as politicians, we can facilitate the opening of doors and, as each minister who has spoken on this statement has said, they have visited the area and have been warmly welcomed by their counterparts.

For many years, I was the only one in this House who had his origins in the area. I suppose I can say that I know that area reasonably well. I have travelled to South-East Asia more times than I can poke a stick at. My most recent visit was to China at the invitation of the Chinese government. It was a wonderful trip where the opportunities extended to delegates to meet with senior party officials and bureaucrats gave the delegates fantastic insights into what China has for the future.

I will not take much more time on this except to say that yes, Chief Minister, you have produced a direction that I hope you will follow. Let us keep our international trade improving, albeit much of it is through national and international forces. However, the Northern Territory can play a part in it and let us keep that going.

The offer of education, for instance, and other training opportunities in the Northern Territory for South-East Asia and China, is something that we have underestimated for too long. For a long while, the Charles Darwin University had disengaged from South-East Asia much to its own

loss. I am glad to see that it is starting to engage again. Let us hope that in the not-too-distant future we will see the benefits coming back to the Northern Territory.

On my own behalf, I encourage the Chief Minister and her ministers to travel in South-East Asia. The initiative that the Chief Minister articulated earlier that she intends to make every minister who travels to South-East Asia an acting Minister for Asian Relations and Trade is a good concept. We should be always conscious of our role in promoting the Northern Territory whenever we travel overseas in our own capacity. Whether we are travelling as individuals or on official business, we can promote the Northern Territory and we should. Whether you take materials into the region or are just going on your own, you can promote the Northern Territory.

It is important that the government considers the amount of material that is currently being produced to be taken overseas. For instance, the magazine called *Territory Business*, I think, has lapsed. It is a pity that that magazine has lapsed. The quarterly magazine was much sought after by the northern neighbours. The magazine, if you recall, was written in Indonesian and English, and when I used to travel into the area in an official capacity on behalf of the Northern Territory government, those magazines were very quickly snatched up. People wanted to see what was happening in the Northern Territory. They wanted to know what was going on, and the options.

Mr Deputy Speaker, we must keep promoting the Northern Territory in any way, shape or form we can manage. I look forward to more of these positive reports from the Chief Minister.

**Mr WARREN (Goyder):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I speak briefly in support of this important statement by the Chief Minister and Minister for Asian Relations and Trade. During her speech, the Chief Minister made a call for all Territoryans to be ambassadors for the Northern Territory to help build and nurture the Territory's relations with Asia. It is incumbent upon each and every one of us to talk up Territory and the Territory economy when we are overseas or in contact with those from other lands. The good news is there is plenty to crow about.

Our economy is currently running a healthy and sustainable growth rate and this is sustainable because the government is committed to ensuring that the Territory's future economic development is sustainable. The sustainable economic development in the Territory is dependent on investment confidence created by a sound and supportive government, a supportive business environment, and a skilled work force all of which we are rapidly developing here in the Territory

under the current government. We already have the foundation for continued strong investment confidence. Access Economics has confidently predicted that the Territory's economic growth will be the highest in Australia over the next five years. Capital expenditure, consumer spending, property prices, tourism numbers, and employment are all continuing to rise. According to the Sensis Business Index, business confidence in the Territory is the highest in the nation and investment confidence continues to rise on the back of a surge of development activity.

Construction work also hit new record levels. This government's investment in major infrastructure projects demonstrates its commitment to supporting a strong economic environment; a truly supportive business environment for all Territory businesses to grow and thrive. Part of this growth in many sectors naturally leads to overseas trade with our Asian neighbours.

My electorate of Goyder encompasses most of the rural area around Darwin and horticulture is the business backbone of the rural area. Whilst the 2005 harvest figures are still being collated, the figures for 2004 show that 108 tonnes of our quality fruit and vegetables to the value of about \$437 000 was exported directly overseas from the Territory. Added to this, possibly four times that amount worth of mangoes alone was sent to interstate markets where they were consolidated into consignments for international export.

It is noteworthy that normally about 10% of horticultural products exported from the NT would have been rambutans and melons which, not surprisingly, make up a big volume by weight. The main markets of our delicious rambutans is Japan while most of our mouth-watering melons are bound for Hong Kong, Singapore and the Middle East, and our iconic Territory mangoes are mainly exported to Japan.

I now want to advise of some of the other growing businesses which are tied to our export trade. Jabiru Tropical Orchids has established a vapour heat treatment plant at Berry Springs to treat our Top End export mangoes. The vapour heat treatment process is required to ensure that fruit fly disinfection is carried out to the high standards required for the export of our fabulous Kensington Pride mangoes to Japan and, more recently, to China. It is expected that this facility will soon be treating Kensington Pride mangoes for export to many other countries in the near future.

For the information of members, the vapour heat treatment process basically uses specific temperature heat to kill fruit fly larvae without raising the temperature to the extent that fruit

becomes unmarketable because it is cooked or damaged. The process not only needs to raise the core temperature of the mangoes to 47°C for 15 minutes, but it also needs to raise and lower the temperature slow enough to condition the fruit and to avoid damage. Only our premium quality fruit is suitable for this treatment as any blemishes or fruit damage is amplified by the vapour heat treatment.

The exporters of rambutan are based around two groups; namely Martin Walker, an exporter from Queensland, and a local grower group called the North Australian Rambutan Marketing Group who use some harvest from Sydney, or Osaka Marketing to export, while they use Simon George in Darwin for their domestic market. Unfortunately, bad seasonal conditions meant the last season's crop was so small that not much was sent anywhere.

We have a healthy and growing seafood and aquaculture industry. The Territory's seafood export is principally done through Sea King Seafood Supply in Winnellie, and we are all very familiar with our world-famous Paspaley Pearls. Paspaley Pearls produce some of the most beautiful pearls in the world and operate pearl oyster leases in Bynoe Harbour, in my electorate of Goyder, and are recognised worldwide as premier suppliers of South Sea pearls.

I am also pleased to report that the multicultural flavour of Goyder is increasing all the time. Many of the small vegetable and fruit growers originally come from South-East Asia, particularly Vietnam and Cambodia. Not only do these fantastic new Australians bring with them a wealth of knowledge in growing a culinary fortune of new and delicious vegetables, they also form a valuable link with the countries of their birth or parental birth. These people and their children are the basis for the cultural links we need to rely on when learning to do long-term business and trade with South-East Asia.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the Chief Minister's statement was important as it restates and reinforces that our long-term economic and trade growth here in the Territory is tied intrinsically to our neighbours to our near north. I am very pleased to support the Chief Minister's statement on Asian Relations and Trade and to be given this opportunity to tell the House of my constituents' involvement in this important area.

**Ms LAWRIE (Family and Community Services):** Mr Deputy Speaker, today I offer my support to the Minister for Asian Relations and Trade, specifically within my portfolio as Minister for Sport and Recreation. I pick up on my colleague's comments relating to the Arafura Games and how that relates to the development of

understanding and engagement with our friends and neighbours.

Sport is, without a doubt, a vehicle to understanding other cultures – a bridge if you like – that, in marketing for the games, offers an opportunity to serve another common goal: to promote the Territory in the region. Historically, representatives from my Office of Sport and Recreation have been involved in the whole-of-government approach to Asian engagement. This has been of great benefit to the Arafura Games regarding networking. The Chief Minister's coordination of the strategic approach to engagement has continued to support this outcome, and allows sport and recreation to be part of the whole package for relationship building in the region.

An Asian Engagement Coordination Group has been established to simplify current inter-agency arrangements and assist with the identification, coordination and implementation of international engagement activities. The terms of reference for this group clearly allow for cross-government coordination and participation and, in particular, the coordination by the Department of the Chief Minister of overseas ministerial travel and a key link strategy to this, the mainstay program.

This program has allowed the Arafura Games to become listed as a mainstay item and, where appropriate, the promotion of the games is incorporated into a minister's overseas travel itinerary. This clearly offers increased opportunity and financial advantage. Inclusion in the program has the potential to increase the effectiveness of the current marketing efforts of the Arafura Games organisers, while also contributing to the achievement of the government's broader objectives. At this stage, the Office of Sport and Recreation has been consulted on several occasions for the mainstay program, and will soon be in a position to provide promotional materials for the 2007 games, which will be held from 12 to 19 May next year. Comprehensive briefings are provided to the relevant ministers prior to their travel.

Proposed activities for the Arafura Games are still in the planning stage. They will be served well by this resourceful approach. The Arafura Games uses a relationship-based approach to marketing within Asia. Good relationships have been built with several bodies, including the Philippines Sports Commission, Brunei Ministry of Youth and Sports, Singapore Sports Council, Chinese Taipei Olympic Council and KONI Indonesian Olympic Council.

The Arafura Games traditionally attracts participants from the Asia Pacific region. At the Arafura Games in 2005, the following five

countries collectively brought more than 150 participants to Darwin: the Special Administrative Region of Macau, Papua New Guinea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Brunei Darussalam. Four of these countries chartered direct flights into Darwin. Only Singapore chose to use regular airline routes, which may well be replaced by Tiger Airways next year. Other Asian countries to participate at Arafura Games 2005 were the People's Republic of China, the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam.

At the Arafura Games last year, the viewing audience was measured at over 145 million people in more than 124 countries and territories, including features in the in-flight entertainment of 30 airlines. Television broadcasters from Macau and Brunei were sent to the games. During the opening ceremony, television footage was being sent to Macau via the Internet and was broadcast on national television. During May last year, the Arafura Games web site recorded more than 3.5 million hits.

Our current focus is on encouraging further participation from Timor, and a comprehensive promotional and support strategy is under way to make the games a valued sporting event in this, our nearest neighbour.

Sporting events such as the Arafura Games underpin the Territory's approach to fostering good sporting relationships with our sporting neighbours. However, we are all too keenly aware of the prospects of exploring further partnerships in the future with key shared sports such as football and boxing. Indeed, many national sporting bodies see Asia as future areas for expansion. We will strive to ensure that Darwin is kept on the map for these important discussions, whether this is through provision of assistance through our Northern Territory Institute of Sport facilities and coaches, or offering an alternate venue for hosting matches.

The Asian region offers Territory sport another frontier. We are ensuring all opportunities are explored, and that we use every avenue for discussions to strengthen our relationships with our neighbours. The Heads of Delegation meeting post the Arafura Games in 2005 identified the importance of the Arafura Games to our neighbours and to the region. They all expressed a strong desire to see a strength and continuation of the Arafura Games. They appreciated the effort the Territory government went to in hosting the games, and they look forward to strengthening these links and ties into the future.

I congratulate the previous minister for Sport, Mr Jack Ah Kit, for his great effort in hosting the Heads of Delegation meeting post-Arafura

Games 2005. As many speakers have alluded to, in working with our Asian neighbours, relationships are very much an aspect of the work that we do. I feel that, in terms of sport and recreation, the work done by the previous minister has held us in very good stead for a very positive Arafura Games in 2007.

**Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank everyone for their contribution to this debate. I certainly thank the opposition for their very positive attitude to what we are doing in Asian Relations and Trade.

I will comment on one aspect of what was said by opposition members, which was that it is good to finally see something happening in Asian Relations and Trade. We ignored the fact for about three years, I believe the member for Grotorex said. Not at all. What this statement does is demonstrate why having Asian Relations and Trade in a central agency such as the Department of Chief Minister means you can bring in all aspects, and so I have a statement that covers all aspects of what this government is doing in Asia rather than, say, more specifically, a traditional Asian Relations and Trade emphasis.

I pay tribute to what ministers have done over the last four years, and to what the CLP did in government in the Asian Relations and Trade area. However, it is my specific intention to get that whole-of-government approach to Asian Relations and Trade. Quite simply, there is a very strong link between trying to bring tourism numbers here to the Territory from our region, to having the air links to be able to support that, the air links to be able to do trade, and the educational approach that supports the air links to be able to move people from our region to Darwin. It is all interconnected and I believe that can be done very well from a central agency like mine.

I pay tribute to those who have worked hard in the area previously, but this is definitely a whole-of-government approach. Carrying the portfolio of Tourism makes it a good link for me. Also, I said that every minister who goes to Asia and is doing work either in the live cattle area, or the education area, or as Treasurer - as has the Deputy Chief Minister, or in health, importantly, every aspect of the work we do in the Asian region is building our relationships and building our trade. Therefore, every minister who travels will be the Asian Relations and Trade minister.

I thank everyone for their comments, for their input into this statement. It is an important part of what we do in government, of what we do in the Territory. As I said in the statement, this is not only about trade with either merchandise or services, this is about the relationships we build in our region. Really, when we consider that we

have 500 million neighbours, it is very important to build those relationships and keep them strong.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**  
**The Contribution Defence makes to the**  
**Northern Territory and the Support**  
**NT Industry and Government**  
**Delivers to Defence**

**Mr HENDERSON (Defence Support):** Mr Deputy Speaker, today I recognise the valuable contribution the Australian Defence Force makes to the Northern Territory economy and to our community. We have heard in the House this week that the Northern Territory is in the midst of an unprecedented period of turbocharged economic growth. Government has a crucial role to play in nurturing and maximising that growth to ensure local business and Territorians generally are reaping the benefits. That is why we are cutting taxes for business and families, skilling Territorians, creating local jobs, building our population, and fostering a climate where local business can continue to grow and prosper. One area where we are working to maximise economic benefits to Territorians is through the significant Defence presence in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory economy and our community has benefited over many years from the Defence presence, but it is not something we can take for granted. Rather, it presents a significant opportunity for us to grow our population, provide more growth potential for local business and develop our jobs and skills base.

I would first like to outline the value of the Defence presence to our economy in our community before moving to highlight government's initiatives and programs to support Defence families in the Territory, and finally, government programs to back Territory business to secure Defence-related opportunities.

The recent Economic Development Summit, '2015 - Moving the Territory Ahead', in Darwin brought together some 100 Territory leaders from government, business, unions, and the community to help shape the 10-year economic road map for the Territory. One of the keynote speakers at the summit, David Rumbens from Access Economics, said that to broaden our industry base, it makes sense to extend from areas of comparative advantage. In other words, maximise on and grow our existing industries and capabilities. Defence was identified as one such area.

The Defence presence in the Territory has more than doubled since the early 1990s. Around 10% of Australian Defence Force combat personnel are now based in the Northern Territory,

with the number of Defence personnel and their families rising around from 6200 in June 1992 to 13 000 at 30 June 2004. That presence has increased further with the relocation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment from Queensland to Robertson Barracks. Defence spending injected about \$828m into the Territory economy in 2003-04, with about half of that amount allocated in wages and the other 50% on operational costs. Added to that is the more than \$1bn Defence has spent on infrastructure in the Territory over the past 10 years, including more than \$120m in 2004-05.

This financial year, Defence is expected to spend close to \$75m on infrastructure projects including the Bradshaw Field Training Area infrastructure of \$23m; 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment facilities at Robertson Barracks of \$31.8m; RAAF Base Tindal advanced air-to-air missile security storage facility, \$0.6m; and HMAS *Coonawarra* Patrol Boat facilities upgrades, \$3.8m.

Long-term industry development opportunities also continue to evolve with constant demand from Defence for goods and services including their through life support of major equipment and infrastructure. The economic benefit to the Territory does not just come from our permanent ADF presence. Visits by Naval ships for training exercises and R&R contribute to Darwin's status as Australia's busiest Naval port. Each visiting warship remains in port for an average of four days, with crew sizes varying from 100 to 1000. It is estimated crew members spend between \$150 and \$200 per person per day, and that boost to local business comes on top of what is spent replenishing each ship's store of fuel and food and minor ship repairs. To give you an example, 4000 personnel were on board when the USS *Tarawa* and its support vessels visited Darwin in August 2005 - they spent \$4m in one week.

The Territory is set to benefit from a likely increase in Australian and foreign military visits associated with exercises and the use of field training areas such as Bradshaw and the Delamere Bombing Range - two important elements of the Australia-US Joint Combined Training Centre initiatives. As the size of the Defence presence continues to grow in the Territory, so does the breadth and size of the benefit to our community and economy. The Defence community makes up more 6.5% of the Territory's population, up from 3.7% in June 1992. The Defence impact on the Territory's population statistics are more significant in Katherine and Alice Springs where, for instance, the Joint Defence Facility Pine Gap personnel and their dependents number around 3000 people - about 11% of the Alice Springs of the population.

These personnel and their families have a significant impact on the Territory's residential developments. The Defence Housing Authority currently manages around 2200 dwellings throughout the Territory. In Alice Springs alone, Pine Gap owns 500 dwellings and the Defence Housing Authority manages an additional 52.

With the Defence population set to grow in Darwin due in part to the relocation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment, DHA plans to invest around \$170m in the development of the new suburb of Lyons on Lee Point Road. The project will comprise 300 new DHA homes with a further 350 allotments available for public sale, and will increase DHA-managed dwellings by about 14% to around 2500 dwellings. The Territory has the most affordable housing and this boost in DHA stock further opens up investment opportunities for Territory families.

It is clear that Defence presents opportunities for the Territory on many levels, but we cannot just sit back and take it for granted. We must get out there, promote our capabilities, and really maximise on opportunities to benefit our community. In our first term of office, the government established a dedicated stand-alone Defence Support Division, allocating \$570 000 to the unit in Budget 2005. Housed within DBERD, the Division of Defence Support's objectives are to maximise the engagement of Territory business in Defence projects, attract new Defence projects to the Territory, and strengthen the relationship between the government and Defence on existing and future projects. The division plays an active role in promoting the capabilities and capacities of Territory business to meet Defence-related contracts both to the ADF and prime contractors, and works closely within industry and defence organisations.

Government also maintains the Defence Support Industries Task Force with representatives from the departments of Chief Minister; Employment Education and Training; Planning and Infrastructure; Corporate and Information Services, and the Darwin Port Authority. The task force provides a whole-of-government approach to major Defence projects. As identified at the Economic Summit, developing the regions and engaging indigenous Territorians in economic development is one of the Territory's most significant long-term challenges.

The economic benefit from Defence to the Territory extends well beyond Darwin on a number of fronts, with projects and military presence driving job growth in the regions. There is no doubt that RAAF Base Tindal and the Joint Defence Facility at Pine Gap play a key role in the economic strength of Katherine and Alice Springs respectively. NORFORCE continues to be a major

employer of indigenous Territorians. The regiment is 600 strong and around 50% of its members are indigenous. The construction of the Bradshaw Field Training Area near Timber Creek has delivered jobs and other benefits to traditional owners. During the civil construction phase, up to 30 indigenous Territorians were employed on-site. In October 2005, 52 people were employed in the building phase; 28 workers were indigenous including seven traditional owners. The employment of traditional owners during construction peaked in November 2005 when 11 of the 40 people employed were traditional owners and a further eight people were indigenous. With the boost in skills and training, traditional owners and other indigenous Territorians employed at Bradshaw are in good position to leverage further benefits over the operational life of the exercise area. The government will continue to keep under critical review any regional or indigenous economic development opportunity that could be pursued associated with Defence activities.

The value of Defence to the Territory cannot be measured only by personnel or projects. Each year, ADF personnel are posted to the Territory for an average two-year posting. In 2004-05, 2287 were stationed in Darwin and 273 in the Katherine and Alice Springs region. The 2003 Defence Census found that around 56% of partners who were not also permanent ADF members worked full-time, 48% had formal qualifications and 22% were undertaking some form of study. Partners and families of Defence personnel play important roles in business, the public sector and in non-government organisations. They bring fresh ideas, new experiences and new networks.

Territorians enjoy a great lifestyle, but the government understands the challenge faced by new families when relocating from interstate - finding new schools and child care for children, partners finding work, and establishing new networks. That is why the government is also working to improve the desirability of the Territory as a posting of choice for ADF members and their families, announcing during the last election a new package of measures to help ADF families get the most from their Top End posting. Last August, the government delivered on its first initiative of the package hosting the first 'Welcome to the Territory Expo' in Oakey and Townsville to roll out the welcome mat for members and families of the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment. Almost 400 people attended the expo to find out more about life in the Top End including schools, child care, job opportunities, sporting clubs and health services. Further expos will be held for Defence families in their home states in the event of major personnel relocations.

In direct response to feedback from Defence families, the government will trial a new bus

service to military bases in Darwin and Palmerston, with possible expansion to RAAF Base Tindal, to help Defence families make the most of Territory life off the base. The government will also establish a new Defence Community Liaison position in this term to work closely with DHA, the Defence community organisations, and the Defence Families Association so the Territory government can better assist Defence families to make their Territory posting as smooth as possible.

In addition to the package of new measures, the Territory government has also been helping to increase the number of child carers available at Tindal, and providing support to the Katherine Combined Children Services Committee for the development of a precinct that will enhance the level of child-care services in the Katherine area.

On a visit to RAAF Base Tindal a little over a year ago, I met with Base Commander, Corrie Metz, to discuss issues on the base and what the Territory government can do to work with Defence to make Katherine a more attractive Defence posting. One of the key issues put forward by Commander Metz was the lack of broadband for Internet access. The government, particularly through the Department of Corporate and Information Services, got to work in support of this bid and lobbied Telstra to see broadband delivered. As a result, Telstra has advised the commissioning date for broadband services at Tindal is the end of this month, and Telstra will soon begin ringing all Tindal families who registered their interest in broadband to get them connected.

At this stage of the Territory's economic development, government has an important role to play in facilitating industry growth. Government has cut taxes, ensuring that the Territory is the lowest taxing jurisdiction for small business in Australia, and we are improving procurement processes. Spending on infrastructure has increased, and we are investing in major projects to drive our economy. The government also recognises that the growth of our industries is reliant on building a skilled work force. The Defence support industry is no exception. Territory businesses engaged in the Defence arena require skilled people with backgrounds in fields as diverse as avionics, marine and automotive services, electronics, communication and engineering.

To support Territory businesses to meet their skills needs, the government will be supporting the training of 10 000 apprentices and trainees over the next four years, including backing businesses who take on trainees. To help businesses meet their skills needs in the short-term, government also supports businesses looking to employ skilled

migrants. DBERD offers valuable advice to employers about the sponsorship of overseas skilled people in trade and professional occupations and is strategically promoting the Territory in overseas markets.

There are many advanced technologies associated with the new Defence platforms arriving in the Territory, such as those on board the Tiger helicopter, arguably the most advanced aircraft in Australia. These demand new skill sets in our local industry if the Territory is to deliver the high-value engineering support required throughout the life of these platforms, and government is working with business to meet those challenges. Government and the Charles Darwin University have signed a landmark partnership agreement, with the aim of combining expertise and resources to foster Northern Territory developments. One area of focus is the development of the Defence support industry.

To underpin this initiative, last year my department, in partnership with the Department of Employment, Education and Training and the Australian Industry and Defence Network, known as AIDN-NT, received a \$100 000 Commonwealth grant allowing AIDN-NT to undertake a Defence industry skills network project. The project being undertaken by AIDN-NT will, amongst other things, research and map the skills gaps and shortages in the Defence support industry and identify barriers to skills development, attraction and retention, and develop strategies to overcome them. The primary aim of the project is to anticipate and identify the skills and work force profile we need to maximise on future opportunities in the Defence industry, and guide and shape the training curriculum at CDU accordingly.

Some of the larger contractors in the Defence industry are leaders in their field, such as in aviation and ship building, and they seek out academic institutions that are able and willing to partner with them to undertake research and design, and to grow the intellect within their companies and their industry. As a first step, I am sure the links we are developing through the Defence Support Schedule between the Defence industry, the Territory government and Charles Darwin University is crucial and will become more valuable over time.

In addition to supporting programs and initiatives to train and skill Territorians to capture job opportunities, DBERD is also actively supporting the development of local business capability to improve their dealings with Defence. For example, DBERD has facilitated a number of successful briefings by Defence personnel and project managers for Territory business on Defence infrastructure projects. For the past two years, the department has also organised a series

of up-skilling workshops in Alice Springs, Katherine and Darwin to improve business capability in tendering to Defence and Defence prime contractors. Initiatives such as these raise SME awareness about how Defence operates, how to interact with both Defence and large Defence prime contractors, and are key to the future success of the local industry.

The Robertson Barracks expansion project alone saw about 90% of the work, or \$74m of the \$82m of the work, subcontracted to local small businesses, providing a major boost to the Northern Territory construction industry, highlighting the value of giving businesses the practical advice they need when tendering for Defence work. Government also provides funding for a local Defence business owner, or a senior Defence industry manager to attend the Defence and Industry Study Course conducted by Defence. It provides an invaluable insight to the operation of Defence and prime contractors.

Government is also working to attract new companies to the Northern Territory to further develop our industry base. For example, under government's new Build Skills NT program, \$28 500 was recently provided to General Dynamics Land Systems Australia, helping them to secure a contract with Alliant Tech Systems in the United States for training in the maintenance of M242 cannons. The cannons are an important component of a number of Defence platforms, including the Armidale Class patrol boats, so this training agreement is a significant step forward in building the skills and capacity of our local Defence support industry. The new training capability could see Darwin become the maintenance hub for Australia and, indeed, potentially, for the South-East Asian and South-West Pacific regions, for one of the ADF's specialised weapons.

Late last year, through the efforts of DBERD and the Department of Chief Minister, the Northern Territory hosted the first meeting of the Defence Council of the Australian Industry Group - known as the AiG - the first meeting to be held outside Canberra in the group's 26 years of existence. The Defence Council has more than 200 members, including the largest Defence prime contractors in Australia. I was pleased to brief the group directly on the Defence presence in the Territory, the capabilities and capacities of our local Defence support industry, and the Territory government's initiatives to support both Defence and business.

Following this briefing, about 120 local business people attended a seminar with the AiG members to hear first-hand about where potential business opportunities lie and what the prime contractors are looking for from Territory business.

DBERD has now started hosting a series of visits to Darwin by prime contractors, some of whom have formed formal arrangements with local SMEs to partner and tender bids for major Defence contracts in the respective platforms which will be based in the Territory.

The government is not sitting around waiting for the phone to ring or for someone to knock on the door and offer the Territory an opportunity. The Defence Support Division is out there scanning the Defence environment, hunting down and gathering in potential opportunities, and promoting the Territory's ability to deliver. The Northern Territory has had a presence at the US Navy Fleet Conference in Singapore, the annual Defence and Industry Conference in Canberra, the biannual national Naval and maritime conference and exhibition, and the annual Land Warfare Conference and exhibition. To assist in the promotion of the Territory's capabilities to industry, and to market to prime contractors as a place to invest and expand their business, the government has produced a DVD which is regularly shown in boardrooms and exhibits interstate. I have today distributed a copy of the DVD to each member for their reference and I hope copies of that have gone around.

Although it is capable, adaptive and agile, the Defence support industry in the Northern Territory is still in its early stages of development. It comprises mostly small to medium enterprises and a few prime contractors. A concerted effort is needed to accelerate the development of the local Defence support industry's capability to better support Defence needs and attract more Defence contracts to the Territory. To ensure that industry is able to capitalise on Defence opportunities, the government has partnered with AIDN-NT to deliver to industry a Defence support industry development strategy to provide a clearer plan for the industry to target, attract and capture more Defence business. The strategy will also identify ways in which government and business can work more closely together to continue to drive the development of the Defence support industry. The project is at the formative and consultative phase, and I look forward to receiving the draft strategy for consideration later this year.

My department has, until recently, delivered secretariat services and executive support to the Australian Industry Defence Network-NT out of its Defence Support Division. I am proud to say that, over the past three years, government has delivered an unprecedented level of support to AIDN-NT to help grow the industry and enhance its role. This current year is a watershed for AIDN-NT, with the government providing funding to enable the association to establish its own executive and put it on a solid footing for the future. With funding of \$125 000, AIDN-NT will be

better placed to provide the level of services and strategic directions that its members require.

I take this opportunity to welcome Mr Andrew Jones who has been appointed as AIDN-NT Executive Officer and has moved to Darwin from Melbourne. Welcome, Andrew! The government has also partnered with AIDN-NT in a number of projects important to the growth of the industry. In 2003, the government provided a grant of \$32 750 to enable AIDN-NT to review the Defence Sector Plans and identify opportunities for the Northern Territory. Building on this, in 2004, the government provided further funding of \$30 000 to AIDN-NT and has worked closely with the association on a project titled 'Collaborating to Compete for Defence Work' which aims to develop a Defence support cluster in the Territory able to combine capabilities to capture lucrative Defence contracts.

What could the future look like? The arrival of new platforms in the Territory opens up opportunities ideal for business clusters - small businesses pooling their skills to target a contract otherwise outside their reach. These will bring to the Territory many new and valuable opportunities for local businesses to engage early with manufacturers with the possibility of playing some part in both the manufacture of the platforms concerned and the delivery of through life support services. Two key observations are that local Defence businesses must be willing to cluster their capabilities to compete for large Defence contracts and equally they must be willing and able to form real working relationships and partnerships with prime contractors.

There are around 1100 armoured and non-armoured vehicles in operation at Robertson Barracks. For some years, Territory businesses have missed out as considerable amounts of Defence-related work, particularly contracts related to the repair, refurbishment, and deep level maintenance of armoured vehicles, has been driven interstate to places below the 'Brisbane line'. One of the reasons of that this transportation of work south has occurred is that the contracts were won by large prime contractors who already have large facilities, equipment and work forces established in southern locations. If the Territory is to properly maximise on Defence opportunities, we must attract prime contractors to establish a presence in the Northern Territory.

Yesterday, I was pleased to announce a major new government initiative aimed at supporting Territory business to secure more Defence-related work by attracting these prime contractors to the Territory: the release of 60 ha of land for the development of an industrial park and Defence support hub beside Robertson Barracks. Sending Defence equipment interstate for repair and

maintenance is costly, both in transportation and potential damage to the equipment, and presents security risks for Defence. Indeed, the draft Land Sector Development Plan released by the Defence Materiel Organisation last year, argued the most strategic solution for the repair, maintenance, or refurbishment of equipment is to do the work as close as possible to where the equipment is based.

Contemporary Defence procurement contracts for platforms such as the Tiger helicopters, and the Armidale Class patrol boats require prime contractors to undertake Through Life Support for those platforms where they are based - in this case, Robertson Barracks for the Tigers and Darwin for the Armidales. The release of land for the construction of an industrial park and Defence support hub so close to where the equipment is based will give the Territory a strong competitive edge in the campaign to attract prime contractors to the Territory.

In March 2004, the Australian government announced that it was spending \$530m to buy 59 Abrams tanks and a fleet of support vehicles from the United States to replace the ageing fleet of Leopard tanks. Forty-one of these Abrams will be based at Robertson Barracks from 2007 and, for the Territory government, their arrival is a potential breaking point, a chance to advocate for Through Life Support and maintenance of the new tanks to be carried out in Darwin. Defence estimates about \$17m would be injected into the Territory economy each year for 15 years if the Through Life Support for the tanks was carried out here, creating about 100 new jobs and opportunities for Territory business.

Construction of a suitable facility to carry out the work on the tanks alone would create in the order of 80 new jobs and economic benefit to local companies. With these potential economic opportunities for Territory business, the government sees the arrival of the Abrams as the ideal platform from which to develop the Defence support hub. As with the Darwin Business Park, the Land Development Corporation will promote the new industrial park and Defence support hub and pursue commercial options with businesses to build, own and operate from the site. The availability of industrial land so close to the barracks will be a significant factor in attracting prime contractors to the Territory and holds great potential for Territory business to work in partnership with prime contractors on Through Life Support contracts.

The hub and industrial park would provide the Territory with opportunities to attract additional defence activities to Darwin, and for Defence and industry to establish a more strategic future, providing prime contractors and SMEs with a

location where they could cluster to deliver a cost effective, efficient and strategic service to Defence.

Well before the formal announcement regarding the Abrams was made, the Territory government was already lobbying Defence to have Through Life Support for these vehicles undertaken in Darwin. I have already held meetings with some of the contenders for the Through Life Support work for the Abrams tanks, and light armoured vehicles contracts to promote the capabilities of Territory business to support this work.

Over the forthcoming months, I am to meet with all of the CEOs of prime contractors who have registered expressions of interest with the Defence Materiel Organisation to tender. A commitment from these prime contractors to carry out Through Life Support work in the Territory would provide considerable subcontractor opportunities for Territory business. The Territory government is establishing an environment conducive to investment and growth by the small business community and is committed to attracting investment into the Territory by Defence prime contractors and Defence itself. A reliable and solid footing now exists upon which the Defence support industry can build for the future.

Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I pay tribute in wrapping up tonight to the public servants and officers in the Defence Support Division of my department, led by Gareth James, the Director. The division has done fantastic work over the last two or three years, and made some real inroads and great contacts and is developing a very strong relationship not only with Defence but also with the prime contractors. These are public servants who are really making a difference to our economy up here and creating opportunities for local business. I commend the statement to the House and also commend the great work that our public servants are doing.

Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

**Mr NATT (Drysdale):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to support the minister's statement on the contribution the Australian Defence Force has on the economy and community of the Northern Territory.

This week seems to be an appropriate time to speak about this subject because, on 19 February 1942, 64 years ago on Sunday, the bombing of Darwin was a significant World War II event that instigated a permanent military presence in the Northern Territory. This Defence sector has become increasingly important to the Territory

economy over the past 64 years, but more importantly, in the past decade or so.

As has been stated by the minister, the extent of the Defence presence in the Northern Territory has more than doubled since the early 1990s. The relocation of a significant proportion of Defence capacity to the Top End resulted from a policy decision by the Commonwealth government to adopt a northern Defence positioning, recognising the great potential for a security threat to come from the north. As such, the Army Presence in the North program, or APIN, commenced in the early 1990s, and was achieved primarily through the relocation of the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade to Darwin from Holdsworthy in New South Wales and Puckapunyal in Victoria. This involved the construction of the Robertson Barracks complex and stimulated the development of Palmerston town centre and the surrounding suburbs.

More recently, Defence-related activity increased in the Territory with Australia's involvement in the United Nations effort to bring peace and independence to East Timor. This provided a short-term but significant boost in Defence-related activity and expenditure in the Northern Territory through 1999 and 2000. We have since experienced similar peaks with the deployment to Iraq and the humanitarian relief efforts following the tragic tsunami.

Also recently, the focus of Defence activity in Northern Australia has been on northern protection following the substantial inflow of unauthorised boat arrivals to Australia, greater preparedness for emergency management, and in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States, United Kingdom, Spain, and the dastardly bombings in Indonesia.

If the growth in Defence Force personnel and family members over the 13 years since APIN program commenced was excluded from the Territory's population figures, it is estimated that the Territory's average annual population growth rate since 1992 of 1.5% would have been around 0.3% lower, at 1.2% - an interesting statistic.

It was also interesting to note that in the minister's statement, that around 10% of the ADF combat personnel is now based in the Northern Territory, with the number of Defence personnel and their families now totalling about 13 000. It is due to this expansion in numbers since 1995 when the Army began relocating in earnest, Defence expenditure attributed to the Territory has increased at an average rate of 11% per annum. One area that has had to be expanded to accommodate this growth of personnel is Defence Housing. The Territory housing construction boom in the late 1990s was largely the result of the Defence numbers increase. A conscious effort

was made to integrate Defence Housing throughout the Darwin and Palmerston region, rather than concentrate housing on Defence bases. This initiative has allowed Defence personnel and their families to assimilate with community life.

I can speak with some authority of this integrated process, because around 20% of my electorate is made up of Defence Force personnel and their families. A significant number of the families are based in the suburb of Durack, and a very large percentage of the students at the Durack Primary School and the specific built child-care centre, are children of Defence parents. To assist the mothers and children to settle into the Territory lifestyle and, more importantly, a school routine, the Defence Department in collaboration with the Durack school's teaching curriculum, has employed a Defence Transition Aide, namely Corinne Hunt. Corinne has an important role of assisting mothers and children with their integration into the school community and, of course, the primary school. The role is a challenging one due to several circumstances peculiar to the life of a Defence Force family. The school's teaching staff are exceptional in their support to Corinne, the children and the mothers. They have come to understand the complexities of the Defence system, but have gone out of their way in many circumstances to ensure the families are welcome and settle into the Top End life with as much support and care as possible.

There has also been some enterprising individuals who have used their initiative to assist Defence families making the move to the Territory. I speak of the publishers of the Top End tri-services newspaper and the northern Defence magazine. These two publications are Territory specific and are printed on a regular basis and distributed to the families. Magazines do not only offer an opportunity for local businesses to advertise, they also provide stories of events, important information, news, and Defence Force updates. The *Top Ender* also provides helpful hints for mothers settling into the Territory life, games and puzzles for the kids and, of course, what would be a family magazine without a recipe or two. I congratulate the editors and all of writers and businesses who have had input into the magazines and thank them for providing the services to the families.

Another arm of Defence Forces that does not receive the recognition it deserves but plays a large role in the surveillance of the Territory and the Kimberley region, and employs a large number of indigenous people is NORFORCE. NORFORCE proudly originates from the North Australian Observer Unit in World War II. The Northern Territory and the Kimberley region of Western Australia covers a vast expanse of

land - 1 800 000 km<sup>2</sup> to be precise - and boasts some of Australia's most isolated and inhospitable country. The success of NORFORCE relies heavily on the trusted relationship it has forged over almost 25 years with the traditional owners of the land. NORFORCE is a reserve unit staffed by both regular and reserve soldiers. Over half of the unit are indigenous men and women from the local communities in the region. One of the many benefits that indigenous soldiers bring to NORFORCE is their detailed knowledge of the land. Without it, many things would go unnoticed by the non-indigenous soldiers. NORFORCE is a wonderful initiative to assist indigenous personnel increase their knowledge, respect and trust, as well as enhance and teach new skills, and increase pride and discipline.

It is pleasing to hear in the minister's statement that it is not only the Top End that receives economic benefits from the Defence Force presence. It is important to recognise the partnerships the Top End has with the forces in Katherine and Alice Springs. The Northern Territory Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development has established a Defence Support Unit with the aim of matching local industry and Defence sector demand. With support from the Australian Industry Defence Network-NT, the unit aims to maximise local industry benefits by encouraging business throughout the Territory to supply and service Defence Force requirements.

For the last two years, DBERD has conducted up-skilling workshops aimed at improving business capabilities in tendering with Defence and Defence prime contractors. Last year, the department conducted workshops in Alice Springs and Katherine on tendering to Defence and Defence prime contractors, and also on profiling company capabilities. In Alice Springs, representatives of Raytheon, the company which delivers the garrison support contract to Pine Gap and is responsible for purchasing goods and services for the facility from local business, shared the podium with departmental members and delivered advice from their perspective on how to engage and win Defence Force business.

It is interesting to note that the department is remaining active with these free workshops, in their latest publication of *Primary Targets*, a newsletter produced for interested Defence tenderers, the workshops will continue this year in the major centres with courses being set up to run in late April and early May. Together with these workshops, the Australian Industry Defence Network-NT e-mails to its members tender opportunities that arise from time to time. Before the association was created, DBERD provided this service to the industry.

Another important role of the department is looking at large Defence procurement contracts, such as the through life support for the Abram tanks, as well as providing assistance to local small to medium enterprises engaged with the prime contractors competing for the work.

It goes to show that the dependence of Defence on the private sector has grown dramatically, particularly in the area of high technology. The value and diversity of the contracts between local suppliers and the Defence Force has been growing steadily over time. Foreign and Australian military forces also use the private sector for the provision of supplies, particularly visiting naval ships, as the minister mentioned earlier.

These are exciting times for Defence and, indeed, the Defence support industry in the Northern Territory. Darwin and the Northern Territory are of strategic importance to Defence, and existing opportunities are on the horizon for the Defence support industry. To support this ongoing build-up, it was great to hear that this government is pursuing the development of a 60 ha allotment adjacent to Robertson Barracks to establish an industrial park which will enable prime contractors and SMEs to establish their businesses within easy access of Robertson Barracks, suburban hubs and transport focal points. It is a wonderful initiative for Defence Force businesses and contractors wishing to make their way north to the Northern Territory.

This government is working exceptionally hard to ensure the Defence sector is highly supported, thus ensuring the long-term viability of the business community of the Northern Territory, which obviously flows into the stable economic framework of our future. Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I support the minister's statement and commend it to the House.

**Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I welcome the minister's statement and give my support, on behalf of my colleagues, for the initiatives provided that support our Defence industry, and the ADF personnel and their families posted to the Northern Territory. However, while the opposition acknowledges the commitment given in this area, we know, as I am sure the minister knows, that more can be done.

As Territorians, we are very proud of our Defence Force personnel based in the Northern Territory. They continue the long tradition of the Defence association with the Northern Territory that the former CLP governments worked to build over many years, in conjunction with both sides of politics on a federal level.

The minister may remember at the last election that the CLP made some promises in relation to Defence. We said that concessional benefits for Territory taxes and charges would be available for Territory-based ADF personnel and their families while they serve on high-risk international missions. A moratorium on charges would be given - such as vehicle registration and insurance, and stamp duty would apply whilst personnel were serving on active duty overseas. We also saw the need to develop a program to ensure spouses of ADF personnel serving overseas are fully aware of job opportunities in the Northern Territory Public Service, and that the NTPS is aware of the skills and qualifications of these spouses and assist, wherever possible, in ensuring that they have every opportunity to gain employment.

An area I know to be of major concern to Defence families when coming to the Top End is access to child care, although clearly that is not an issue restricted to Defence families. At a morning tea hosted in Palmerston some time ago and attended by Defence spouses, this concern was very real and created great angst amongst families. At this time, child care was just not available for the number of Defence families wanting to put their kids into care and, whilst some work has been undertaken in this area, many of these concerns remain and we must do more to assist.

Another concerning factor to our Defence Force families is schools, and I am sure the minister is well aware of that. Many are to capacity and all of us know that the education of children is a major factor for young couples settling in the Territory and of particular interest to Defence personnel who naturally move around regularly.

In the Territory, we are trying to sell what we all describe as the Territory's unique lifestyle and a wonderful place to live, which is difficult when you see headlines about crime, antisocial behaviour, waiting lists, people waiting on trolleys in hospitals - in essence the state of our health system - and a number of other warning signs that the Territory exhibits under this government.

Those things do not paint a pretty picture for anyone interested in coming to the Northern Territory. It is incumbent upon a government to address those matters; no doubt in his reply the minister will say that he is. However, he will, as he is going to sleep tonight, know that government and he should be doing even more.

When I say these things I do not want to be accused of talking down the Territory; they are facts. We know why we came here and it is important for us as politicians to ensure that the Northern Territory offers the very best of

everything so that our population - that is our migration from other states - increases and does not decrease.

They are some of the issues which we know affect Defence personnel and we wait, along with other Territorians, to see those matters addressed. I feel that the minister does have a genuine interest in Defence; I am not sure that he necessarily did when he got the job. However, like any job, whether it is ministerial or shadow ministerial, one learns a lot and then develops an interest, and things which you may never have thought were interesting become nothing short of fascinating. That gives all of us a great sense of satisfaction in a job where often there is not any. Having said that, I believe the minister does have a genuine interest, and I applaud him for that.

There is much more work to do; we need to ensure the Territory is presented well and that we continue to attract all kinds of people - in the context of this statement, Defence personnel. This involves working with the federal government. I hope the minister will do so in the way that his colleague, the minister for fisheries, has elected not to.

I hope that the minister can take on some of those constructive proposals. I know political parties offer all sorts of things during election campaigns. However, I do not see anything wrong with what the CLP offered up. I look forward to hearing the minister's response. I thank him for bringing on the statement.

**Mr BURKE (Brennan):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the minister's statement. The Territory has had a long association with Defence. A change in federal government policy over a decade ago saw a change in focus to the northern borders of Australia. Accordingly, we have seen a shift in Defence assets and capabilities to the Territory's Top End and Katherine.

The Territory has a much higher proportion of its population serving as reservists than any other Australian jurisdiction. The business community in the Territory is more willing to release their employees for the purpose of serving as reservists than anywhere else. I was once involved in enterprise bargaining negotiations with a large employer whose staff wanted a provision enabling them to leave to undertake reserve and emergency service duties. The employer was not immediately convinced. The point was made that volunteer service with our emergency services, and enlistment or commissioning in the reserves, was perhaps more important here in the Territory than the employer realised. The employer went away and made phone inquiries. When negotiations resumed, the leave was agreed without further discussion.

Let me say that I am well aware of the cost to an employer in allowing an employee leave, even unpaid leave. I commend private enterprise for being prepared to support their employees being involved in emergency services and military reserve service.

The Northern Territory Public Sector has led the way nationally with its provisions enabling staff to participate in these important roles. The allowance of up to four weeks paid leave annually to undertake reserve service shows the commitment that the Northern Territory government has had for a long time toward Defence. The provision of such generous leave has not ever, as far as I know, been something that has been argued against by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, or the government of the day.

We are yet to discover whether Defence leave will be an allowable matter in an award or enterprise bargaining agreement. Members may not be aware that the inclusion of a matter in an award or enterprise bargaining agreement that is not an allowable matter makes void the entire award or agreement. Unfortunately, many of our businesses and workers have to wait. We do not know how long, but the federal government is yet to determine this question by regulation. The arrangement can remain in place because of the goodwill of the employer and its employees. Unfortunately, if the EBA or award is invalidated, this places small business in a worse situation than a worker who is a union member. The union will simply act on behalf of their members with no further cost to the member, other than their union dues. The small employer, on the other hand, could face considerable difficulty if they choose to renegotiate the EBA on their own, and at a considerable cost if they choose to use the services of an industrial lawyer. Large companies are well able to wear the cost of legal services.

Many private enterprises provide discounts to Defence personnel and their families. I commend them for being involved in the DEFCOM scheme. Almost every shop I pass in Palmerston has the sticker in its window. I compare this to my time in Victoria, where it was more of a surprise to see the sticker than not see it.

Today, the minister has detailed a number of economic and social benefits that the increased presence of the Australian Defence Force has brought, and will continue to provide, to the Northern Territory. In his speech, he noted the ongoing role that the Northern Territory government has in engaging private sector partners to meet the Australian Defence Force's capability needs in the Northern Territory, in both the short- and long-term. The minister also outlined the opportunities this presented for

developing our jobs and skills base, and he noted that the land, sea and air defence platforms demand new skill sets in our local industry. Members would be well aware of the increase in demand for skilled labour on our major projects. This is particularly so in the Defence support industry. It is quite clear that the development of a viable defence support industry, drawn from local businesses, relies on developing short- to medium-term, as well as long-term, skill development strategies. Otherwise, our small businesses in the Defence industry support sector will miss out on a great deal of economic opportunity.

The minister talked about a current project to identify the capacity of our local businesses, and our trading institutions to meet the Australian Defence Force's capability needs. We are fortunate in our government to have dedicated and professional people working in an integrated way towards these objectives. A key player in this project is Unions NT. Their participation represents the strong commitment the unions have made to increase the productive potential of our work force without sacrificing safety, workers rights, or living standards. The current industrial relations climate has also made their input so much more important.

I acknowledge the efforts of two key people working with Unions NT: the Industry Development Officer, Terry Lawler, and Occupational Health and Safety Officer, Didge McDonald, for the work they do in relation to realising key government, economic and social priorities. Terry's comprehensive industry knowledge and research expertise adds a great deal of practical value to the work of the Defence Industry Skills Network Project mentioned by the minister. Terry is an effective participant in this and a range of other skill development projects and planning groups. His work with Unions NT complements the strategic initiatives outlined by the government under the Jobs Plan. His ongoing efforts to help all Territorians benefit from the economic opportunities that have emerged in the Territory are to be commended. The OH&S Officer, Didge McDonald, has also gained wide support for the consolidation of OH&S enforcement in the mining and electrical services sectors under NT WorkSafe. This experience has been brought to the Defence Industry Network where Didge plays an important role engaging with businesses.

On Valentine's Day, the government announced the proposal for development of a Defence support hub and industrial park on a 60 ha site on Thorngate Road just down from Robertson Barracks. This is a brazen grab for more of the enormous amount of work that Defence generates for independent contractors.

No member of this Assembly could surely criticise the government for this initiative. Through life support and maintenance are extremely important concerns for Defence. Defence, understandably, has an interest in securing quality, security-sensitive contractors to perform this work. We, therefore, have an opportunity, especially with the arrival of the Abrams tanks and Tiger helicopters to show that we are best placed to meet these interests. One of the aspects of security is how far material has to travel to get its maintenance and through life support. The logistics of moving material a few hundred metres down the road must be simpler than organising movement to facilities interstate.

I know that there are plenty of businesses that are very keen to have more involvement in Defence work. General Dynamics is one such company. Members are probably aware that they have a workshop in the Yarrowonga Industrial Estate. They perform maintenance on a variety of Defence vehicles such as the ASLAV. I am sure that Peter Callaghan, the general manager, would be very pleased to take up the additional work that may become available in the event that one of the Defence prime contractors took the opportunity to relocate facilities to the new Defence support hub and industrial park.

The Northern Territory Department of Education, Employment and Training's Curriculum Services provides support to schools to help mobile children. This is even more prominent in schools with high Defence Force numbers. DEET is also closely involved with the Australian Defence Force in relation to the Defence School Transition Aide Program. The program is funded by the ADF through its Defence Community Organisation. The Defence School Transition Aide Program places DST aides in 68 schools across Australia which have high numbers of Australian Defence Force families. Ms Janet Durling is the current Regional Education Liaison Officer employed by the DCO in Darwin, and she oversees the Defence School Transition Aide support through school principals. This program has resulted in positions in five Palmerston schools: Bakewell, Durack, Driver, Sacred Heart Primary School and Palmerston High School. Each of these schools do an excellent job managing the special needs of their Defence children and young adults.

The Northern Territory provides support through its schools, providing in-kind resources such as office space access; phone usage; other office consumables; access to relevant professional development; access to computer and LAN networks; executive team support for the Regional Education Liaison Officer regarding access to support services; assessments to identify additional tutoring needs for Defence

Force children; and student access via phone and e-mail to previous school friends interstate, and information access to new schools prior to transfer. DEET staff, particularly Student Services, also liaise closely with the REDLO and ADF staff in meeting the educational needs of students with special needs. Each of the DEET schools employing DSTAs work very closely with the DCO to assist ADF families as they relocate to a new school.

I take this opportunity to welcome Ms Naomi Millers, the new Defence School Transition Aide at Bakewell Primary School. Ms Millers has come from Queensland where she held a similar position. I have asked a number of people what benefit they saw in the DSTA position. I was advised that, often, Defence families have contacted the DSTA in the area to which they are to be transferred prior to their uplift. This creates an immediate friendly link for families coming into the Territory for the first time and without existing ties here. The DSTAs support families with queries about our education system. It is unfortunate that our various state and territory education systems do not neatly marry with each other. Defence families feel the full brunt of this, and anything that the federal and state/territory governments can do, ought to be done to rectify this. The DSTA support parents in organising additional tutoring for their children. They will also accompany parents to meetings at the school as support persons if requested.

One important area is to support students who have a parent on operational deployment. There are many such children and teenagers in Palmerston who have a parent currently deployed in Iraq. Every time we see footage and media reports from Iraq, many in our community who are watching are thinking of a spouse, father or mother, who is at work. I know that the principals of the schools very much appreciate the efforts and results of the Defence School Transition Aides.

Defence is an important part of our Territory community and economy. I thank the Minister for Defence Support for his statement.

**Ms SACILOTTO (Port Darwin):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I enthusiastically support the minister's statement regarding the contribution Defence makes to the Northern Territory. The Defence Force members and their families make a huge contribution, not only to the security of the Territory, and Australia and, importantly, their contributions to the economy, but also to our skills base.

Many of the Defence members who come to Darwin for a posting also bring with them a spouse, many of whom will integrate

enthusiastically into our way of life and take up positions within the community, in either paid or unpaid work. These are skills that we would not otherwise have access to. On a major employment web site, there are currently 1301 vacant positions listed to be filled in Darwin. We welcome and value the contribution of the Defence spouses.

Defence-related contracts continue to play a major role in the Top End economy. In December 2005, the Minister for Defence Support, Hon Paul Henderson, made an announcement that was headed, 'Darwin to Become Centre for Defence Maintenance'. Through a new government scheme administered through DEET, Build Skills NT, a grant of \$28 500 was awarded to Darwin's General Dynamic Land Systems Australia. This grant has supported two Darwin GDLSA staff members to train in Mesa, Arizona and bring the skills home. We now have two Territorians who are now not only fully qualified to maintain and repair the M242 cannons which are featured on our new Armidale Class patrol boats, we also have two Territorians who are qualified to train other staff members. This has made a direct impact and has increased the capacity and capabilities of the Territory's work force.

The Territory regularly hosts visiting Australian and overseas Navy vessels. These, accompanied by joint exercises and Defence training exercises including representatives of several foreign Defence services, are a huge boost to the Territory economy. It is estimated that for every visiting ship there is an on-spend of \$150 to \$200 per person per day. For Port Darwin, this is a fantastic boost. Being so close the wharf, the many traders within Port Darwin are happy to play host to these working visitors and the town is usually abuzz when a big vessel is in port.

The Defence Housing Authority will also be boosting our local economy with the new Lyons estate. The building of this estate will provide further employment opportunities for Territorians. It will be a landmark residential development which will enhance the surrounding suburbs. This new estate will ensure that Defence personnel who play an important role in the socioeconomics of the Territory are integrated into our unique Territory lifestyle.

Defence personnel contribute to our lifestyle in numerous ways. One only has to look at the contribution that these personnel have made to our regional centres such as Katherine and Alice Springs. One example that springs to mind is the famous Henley-on-Todd where, without the contribution and participation of Defence personnel, this major tourist event would surely not be the success it has been, year in and year out.

The Defence industry has and will continue to play a major role in the economic development of the Territory's economy, but with the added bonus of bringing talented and dedicated people to the Territory. They add to the Territory's vibrant and diverse population.

**Mr WOOD (Nelson):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for his statement tonight. It is important that we are updated on the benefits Defence has for the Northern Territory.

I note that there is one glaring gap in what the minister has stated here tonight. One of the great benefits to the economy of having the Army in the Northern Territory is the car sale boom. I can guarantee that Holden and Ford certainly appreciate the help that the Defence Forces has in the Northern Territory because I see many of those vehicles in my electorate. I know that many of those people are only here for a couple of years so the next lot of soldiers who arrive will probably do the same thing. Whilst I say that in jest, all those people who come to the Territory in the Defence Force are helping the economy just because they live here. Not only are they buying cars, they are down at the local pubs in Palmerston or the northern suburbs. Just by having those extra people in the community the economy is helped as well.

It is very important to recognise the importance of Defence. It is also important that we as non-Defence people try to keep those lines of communication open so that we do not have problems that have sometimes occurred in places like Townsville where it was a 'them and us' situation. Ever since the Defence Force upgraded, you might say, to expanding with Robertson Barracks, there has been a continual effort made by both the previous government and this government and the Department of Defence to make sure that did not happen. I see from some of the things that minister said that is still an important part of what the government is doing.

Hopefully, our little Anzac Day cricket match, which is held between the Litchfield President's XI and the Army, is in a small way a means to do exactly that: keep those doors open between civilians and the Defence Force. That is very important. It also tells our Defence people that we think they are important because they do have an important role.

Many of those people do put their lives on the line in Afghanistan, Iraq, the Solomon Islands, and also helping people in the earthquake areas of Pakistan. Just to show you how much support people do give to our Defence Forces, they may not say it, but we have a large board called the Wall of Yellow Ribbons at the Howard Springs Shopping Centre and it is literally jam-packed with

yellow ribbons. Whilst many people might come out and say that they are not too happy about federal policy about this or that, there is genuine support for our soldiers overseas. I know that from the way people still buy yellow ribbons at Howard Springs.

I also realise that as the barracks get bigger there is going to be more equipment with the new tanks and other equipment such as the Aviation Regiment. Therefore, as the minister said, there will be spin-offs which will be coming to the Territory, especially for maintenance of that equipment.

I am interested to hear more about the 60 ha of land. I say to the minister, I know you do not have to tell me your secrets of when you are going to announce when this is going to happen, but it would be nice to know as I am a supporter of the Defence Force in my area. They are a major part of my electorate, even from my time as President of the Litchfield Shire – it is in the Litchfield Shire. I would like to be kept up with what is happening with this development of an industrial park. I know you offered me a briefing; however, to some extent it would have been nice to tell me it was going to happen. The last I heard of it was on a plane somewhere sitting with a person from the department saying 'We are thinking about it', and I have not heard any more.

I should say - and this is an aside - it is good to see the government using some of that land for industrial development. I know I might hear a groan from some members ...

**A member** interjecting.

**Mr WOOD:** Thank you; that was a groan. However, I have said that the land near the Robertson Barracks is ideal industrial land. I know the government wants to use the middle of the harbour. The industrial land you are citing is on the rail corridor to Glyde Point; ideal for what you are trying to do. It is a major corridor and it will service not only the Army, but the industrial area nearby. There is room for more industrial area and development in that area, not just for the Army, but in general for the Darwin area.

I was at the railway the other day watching the train getting loaded up for an exercise in South Australia. I see that the Defence Force has a role in keeping the rail going. They will be paying freight for their tanks, ASLAVs and other equipment going by rail; that is an area which we should not ignore either. It was very impressive seeing a full load of armoured vehicles heading out from the railway station. It makes you realise how much Defence equipment is in the Top End. It is one of the areas which can help the railway

and that is good as well. All the freight we can put on the rail will help that form of transport.

Just a few issues and the minister has probably heard them before. You mentioned the 300 extra houses at Lyons which will be helping accommodate people from the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment. The more we develop Robertson Barracks and the more we have people living in the northern suburbs, I can guarantee the more traffic we will have in the residential area of Knuckeyes Lagoon. There has been talk of putting an entrance from the south-west corner of Robertson Barracks on to McMillans Road. It has been looked at by the Department of Defence and they were talking to Litchfield Shire. However, as happens many times, it is very difficult to find out if there is a time line. I ask the government if we are increasing the amount of traffic in that area - that is, 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment people living in the suburb of Lyons - can we look at pushing this alternative route into the barracks rather than making much of that traffic go through what is really a residential area. Even though most people can live with that, if we do not do something now it will only get worse.

The minister mentioned the bus service to the barracks and called it a 'new' bus service. You might be able to say what happened to the old bus service, because that was only announced a little while ago, and now you have a new one. I am interested to find out what the bus service is about. Is there a bus service to Robertson Barracks? Is it a user pays bus service? It is a good idea; I do not have any problem with that. However, it would be nice to know the details. What is it meant to do, and how will it be paid for?

There is no doubt that there is no one in the House who would disagree with what the minister has in his statement. I support that, but I should say a few words about the new brigadier, Brigadier Craig Orme, who has just arrived. I thought I recognised that name when I heard it announced, because he has been up here before. I believe some of his family have lived in the Northern Territory for quite a while. When I was on Litchfield Shire Council, he was a part of the Defence Force at Robertson Barracks. I welcome his appointment. I had some long discussions about various issues that surround the location of the barracks within the shire. One would have been the traffic; the other was the industrial area that was occurring there. As with all the brigadiers we have had at Robertson Barracks, I found Brigadier Craig Orme a person who has that common touch, as well as being the boss of the Army. I welcome him here.

Minister, I thank you for bringing this to our attention. The Defence Force will continue to grow; maybe not in numbers. I am sure as time

goes on equipment will be upgraded, and there will be requirements to train people in maintaining new equipment. It is important that we give all the support we can to our Defence Forces. Sometimes we tend to take them for granted, and we complain about them speeding up and down the road. That does not mean we will not complain about them speeding up and down the road, but we do still appreciate the great work they do. In the end, they put their lives at risk when going overseas, and we have to make sure that we tell them that we do support them.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the minister's statement tonight.

**Mr KNIGHT (Daly):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I support a very deserved statement by the Minister for Defence Support. I have quite a lot of aspects in and around my electorate which are Defence related, and I would like to provide that perspective to the minister's statement. These areas include the Bradshaw Field Training Area, as the minister mentioned; part of the Tindal RAAF Base where I live in Katherine; Delamere Bombing Range and, obviously, the movement of troops up and down the highways within my electorate.

The Tindal defence base has done much for Katherine. I am sure the member for Katherine will talk more about that. Members of the Tindal base regularly come to various parts of my electorate and provide added income for roadhouses, and participate in sports. I have played against the Tindal Football Club a few times, and give them a bit of a bump now and again. They have a fishing club which regularly participates in social activities in Katherine township, at Timber Creek for fishing days, and also at the Roper River. They are a good part of the social scene within Katherine. There is also a group of Tindal Defence staff who use the facilities at Pine Creek for water skiing and that is very much welcomed.

The regular refurbishment of housing at Tindal provides a lot of work for contractors in Katherine. At Delamere, thanks to the American Army bombing one of the facilities there, many of the contracting staff within Katherine had a lot of work from that.

The child-care issues that the minister mentioned is very much welcomed. That issue is very hot within Katherine, and certainly with the Defence staff. It is encouraging that minister Lawrie has visited and spoken to the local group. It is good to see that the Minister for Defence Support is also pushing that same line to get better child-care facilities within the Katherine township for Defence staff.

The Bradshaw Field Training Area is probably the most significant Defence facility within the Daly electorate. As the minister mentioned, of the \$23m for the construction of it, I am not too sure if that covers the construction of the bridge. I have a long history with that whole development, from when it was purchased in the late 1990s, in involvement with the local Aboriginal people there in negotiation with Defence for the purchase and access to the property.

The bridge, which took quite a few years to build, is a magnificent facility. Defence consulted with the locals and, as a result, you can actually walk out onto the bridge to take a photo or drop a line. I do not know what would happen if you actually caught a fish because you have to pull it up about 50 feet, and there is no chance of netting. It is a fabulous facility, certainly a tourist attraction, and many people stop there to take photos from the bridge.

The John Holland Construction Company has been working with the NLC and the local people. They have employed 12 local Aboriginal people from the Timber Creek area in that construction. These trainees have undertaken the first half of a construction course which will give them national accreditation and competencies towards a Certificate II in Construction Work. The first half of that was completed two weeks prior to Christmas, and the next part will be finished two weeks after the end of February. This has been conducted by the ATI - Advanced Training International - facilitated by the NLC and the Territory Construction Agency. It is good to see those Northern Territory organisations coming together and working to get more out of these Defence projects for the local community.

In addition, the NLC and Territory Construction Agency have also negotiated a four-week introduction course in the hospitality industry. There are four local ladies who have been engaged to assist in the laundry business for the workers camp and cleaning the rooms of the camp for the Defence staff and troops that go there for the training. In addition to that, they will be undertaking other courses with accredited modules and national competencies. The John Holland Group, which constructed the bridge, is also doing a lot of the work for the construction of the road system. There is something like 200 km of road being built and two 500-man camps for the troops who had come in. They have utilised the local services within Timber Creek; the hotels there provide meals so that is encouraging for those local hotels.

The NLC and the TCA are also working with the traditional owners to get landscaping contracts for Bradshaw. It is good to see that they are all working together. In my time, we spoke with the

land council about getting access over there for traditional owners. Bradshaw has a great significance for the local Ngaliwurru and Ngarinman people, and also the Jamarjuna people who are up a little bit to the north. In the centre of Bradshaw, the Koolendong Valley is a very culturally significant area, and when the idea of people getting onto Bradshaw came up, Defence were very interested in doing that, and that is being talked about at the moment. The Bradshaw area is part of a trading route from Port Keats and Peppimenarti, down through to Timber Creek. There was an idea put forward by the traditional owners to actually reconstruct that walk by going on a horse ride up the Koolendong Valley to Port Keats. That is certainly something we want to make happen. Hopefully, this Dry Season it will happen.

Another benefit to the community with the Defence Force is the mobilisation of troops. As the member for Nelson highlighted, it can sometimes be a bit of a problem if you are on the highway and you have 50 vehicles in front of you that you have to overtake. The roadhouses along the way and the small towns appreciate the custom that the Defence staff bring to them. They enjoy the company of those staff when they do come through.

In Katherine, Tindal has brought many benefits to the town but, as the member for Nelson also intimated, it does have some downsides. It is pretty well regular that when you put your kids to bed at 8.30 pm that at 8.45 pm, a jet goes over and wakes them up again, but that is one of those little things. The open days that Tindal put on are very well attended. They bring out almost every part of their equipment. I know that my children enjoyed that event and I hope they continue to have them.

In the lead-up to Anzac Day, it is a time to remember the people at Tindal and other Defence staff who go away to areas of conflict and put their lives on the line. That is something to remember on the way to Anzac Day. These people sign up - it is not just a job, it is a risky business - and we appreciate the work they do. I certainly appreciate the involvement that the Defence Force has in my electorate and in the Katherine region. I commend the minister's statement to the House.

**Mrs MILLER (Katherine):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I also welcome the minister's statement, and express my gratitude to the Defence Force for the wonderful work they do and the strong commitment they make defending Australia.

I know people will say they got into the Defence Force and that is part of the job, but I appreciate the work they do. I know there have been some people who have gone overseas and

served for long periods of time and have had to leave their families, and it has put a lot of strain on those families. They have handled it very well and fortunately, all those people I knew came home.

I wanted to speak mainly about families in Katherine. Tindal RAAF Base is about 17 km south of Katherine, and it is a really beautiful base. It is well set out and has wonderful facilities which make life very comfortable for those families who come to Tindal. I know that when people are first told they are going to Tindal they think they are out in the middle of nowhere but, because of the facilities there, it is like a little paradise on its own. It is a really beautiful spot.

Over the years that I have lived in Katherine, I have become very good friends with quite a few of the people who have served at Tindal. As I have been listening to some of the speakers I have been remembering some of the wonderful times we have had with those people. We still keep in touch with many of them, so that is one of the really good aspects.

Just recently, we had a welcome expo in the gymnasium to give the new intake of personnel some assistance in getting to know what was available in Katherine - what organisations, sporting organisations and other not-for-profit organisations were there so that they could become involved in them. It was good to see. There were fewer families, I think, arriving at Tindal this year, but they were young families with kids and it was good to see that. With school now back, it gives those people who have just arrived at Tindal the opportunity to meet new parents and children from Katherine and to integrate more easily into the community. Over the years, it has been really gratifying to see how so many of those people who come to Tindal do mix in with the community, get involved in activities. In most instances, these people contribute much and they have started their involvement from school level.

Katherine is a pretty sport-oriented town and offers a variety of sporting experiences and activities. One sport that has been revived in the last couple of years is the Katherine Off-road Motorbikes. This club's revival has been directly attributed to the enthusiastic commitment of quite a few men who are rev-heads at heart from Tindal RAAF Base. It has been very good to see the involvement and development that has happened at the Katherine Off-road Motorbike track.

I first visited that track in May last year, and I can assure you I got hooked right from the minute I drove in there. I am actually a bit of a rev-head from long ago so every opportunity I have I go to the Katherine Off-road Motorbikes. Many of the participants, and I am talking about all age groups, from dads - and there are some women who compete there as well - are from the RAAF Base.

My heart went out to the quad bikes. There were only four competing on these little quad bikes and you could barely see the competitors on them as they were so small. I thought these young people were so brave even getting out there and attempting it. It was not long before I was hooked enough to be the patron for the quad bikes. The Tindal RAAF Base has revived a sport that is very popular and, yes, it is dangerous, but it has kept many kids occupied on weekends and during the week if they get the opportunity to go to the track.

The Tindal Fishing Club has always been an extremely active club and the location of Tindal offers these people who are fortunate enough to have their boats the opportunity at weekends to go to the river systems around Katherine. They can go in just about any direction and put their boat in and catch some fish. They are pretty excited about that. The interesting thing is that there are many people who come to RAAF Base Tindal who leave the RAAF and stay around Katherine. That is really fantastic. They have fallen in love with the lifestyle; their children have probably gone through high school and got jobs and they want to stay. We are very grateful for that, so Katherine has much to offer those people.

The exercises that have been held around Katherine, I can assure you, are a wonderful tourist attraction. They might wake the kids up at night, but they are a great tourist attraction. I must admit that I love listening to the sound of the exercises when they are held. It is noisy, but that is what you expect when you live near an RAAF base and I do enjoy the activity in the sky when they are holding exercises. The mobilisation of the troops going through Katherine is a real attraction for everybody; they need to come into Katherine to go to Bradshaw or to go south to Tindal. We get the opportunity to see many troops on the road and I do not find that annoying at all. It is great, it shows a sign of strength and it is something that I enjoy seeing.

On a lighter note, when my husband and I had Red Gum Tourist Park, during the exercises I went down to the post office to pick up the mail. I knew the exercises were happening around town because they often used to come in and ask us to identify these particular people when they came through and give them a ring and we would 'identify the enemy' – yes, we were undercover agents! On this particular day, I went to the post office to collect the mail and came back down the Victoria Highway to be greeted by a line of tanks on the opposite side of the Red Gum in a gully. All of the guys in their full camouflage gear were lying on the ground with all the guns pointed at my shop. The amusing thing was that whilst they were in the middle of this exercise a couple of them were buying hamburgers! It was just so funny. These guys really did put a lot of effort into

their exercises around Katherine. I was under siege for a while; however, I did not feel threatened, I felt quite safe.

The majority of the RAAF children attend the Casuarina Street School in Katherine. Some of the children who have attended that school have been lucky enough to have completed their schooling in Katherine. Children of one family we said goodbye to at the end of last year started there in Year 1 and were able to complete their primary schooling in Katherine, which was pretty special.

I heard the member for Daly speak about child care and the concerns there were regarding the lack of child care in Katherine. Yes, we have had very limited numbers of child-care spaces. However, I am pleased to say there is a private developer who will have a child-care facility up and running before the end of the year, so the child-care placements will not be an issue.

There is one issue which is a big detractor for the RAAF Base Tindal families when they arrive in Katherine. It continues to be a problem and it is nothing new. It is the antisocial behaviour we have in Katherine's main street. It is very distressing for some of those families who have never experienced it before. I have seen many families who have looked quite frightened when they have gone to the Woolworths shopping centre and been humbugged for money and generally annoyed. As they have not had the experience before, they do not know how to deal with it. I have watched many times over the years mothers with their shopping trolleys and the children waiting inside the door for their husbands or a cab to come and pick them up, as they were too scared to go outside.

Antisocial behaviour is something which needs to be - as we say over and over again - addressed, and it needs to be taken very seriously with some serious action, as it is a detractor.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoy having the RAAF Base Tindal in my electorate and I enjoy visiting the people there. It is a great base. I appreciate the contribution they make to the Katherine township and region, and all the community involvement they have. I would be more than happy if we could double the size of the base and have double the number of people there.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for his statement.

**Mr HENDERSON (Defence Support):**  
Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank all honourable members who have contributed in the debate tonight with, in general, very supportive comments. Each and every one of the 25 of us in here

respects and admires the work that our Defence Force personnel do, not only here in Australia but around the world. Politics does come into play from time; however, one thing everybody in Australia does is support those personnel when they are deployed overseas, particularly in conflict situations.

I want to address the Leader of the Opposition's comments first. She talked about the pledges the CLP made to Defence personnel during the election. I can honestly say I do not recall much media around that. I am not sure what she was trying to do tonight: seeing whether we would match those pledges? We made our own pledges to Defence personnel and will be implementing those commitments through the life of this government.

She talks about the child-care issues in Palmerston and, yes, there are child-care issues throughout the Northern Territory. Palmerston is certainly not unique. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that it is the federal government which is responsible for child care, not the Northern Territory government. We are the only state or territory in Australia that provides a subsidy direct to child-care centres, and we increased that subsidy in the last term of office. It is good to see that another ABC Child Care centre is under construction in Palmerston as we speak. Hopefully, that will alleviate and meet some of the demand in Palmerston.

On the education issues, yes, the government is very mindful that, when families transfer from interstate into the Territory, settling into a new education system is always difficult. During the consultation regarding the Middle Years Program, we had very specific and targeted consultation with Defence in regards to that change, and there was overwhelming support for the Middle Years Program and initiative from the Defence community. Government is aware of those issues; we do consult directly with Defence and the Defence Community Organisation in regards to those issues.

The Leader of the Opposition could not help herself in having a bit of a go, saying it is all very well you doing all of this stuff, but when Defence personnel come here, there are big problems with crime and antisocial behaviour and that is a real detriment. There is crime in any community. I am not going to go through it again, but there is certainly a lot less crime around the Northern Territory in the last four years than the preceding four years - a 50% decrease in property crime in an area like Palmerston. When we came to government, there would not be a night go by without three or four properties being broken into. That has been reduced by 50%, so there is certainly a lot less crime around the Northern

Territory under a Labor government than there was when there was a CLP government in the Northern Territory. Antisocial behaviour is a significant issue, and we are implementing strategies to try to improve that situation. To somehow say that it is a real negative for our Defence Force personnel, I have not heard it.

I get out to many Defence communities and functions, and talk to DCO and DHA. Overwhelmingly, once people get here, they are very pleased to be in the Northern Territory. There is some apprehension, but that is why we have initiated, as we did for the 1<sup>st</sup> Aviation Regiment, a road show to inform people before they transfer to the Northern Territory, what they are coming to and what a wonderful place they are coming to, and we have had huge feedback. Again, that is the Leader of the Opposition talking the Territory down.

I just want to let her know that I did have an interest in this portfolio when we first came to government. I was actually born on an American military base. My father worked as a marine surveyor for NATO and travelled a lot. In my trade, I spent a lot of time working on Naval vessels in shipyards, and if HMAS *Melbourne* had not been decommissioned, I would have gone into the Navy as a cadet engineer. I have always had an interest in the forces, and I am very proud to be Minister for Defence Support.

I thank our members from Palmerston and their commitment to really understanding the needs of Defence Force personnel and their families. The members for Drysdale and Brennan work very hard in understanding those issues, and from their contributions here tonight, they have a really good grasp. They continue to lobby me on issues relating to personnel and their families, and it is great to have that real connection into those communities via our local members - they are doing a great job.

It was interesting the member for Brennan mentioning the DEFCOM scheme and how all of the businesses in Palmerston support that scheme. I had not thought of it like that and, yes, it is great; it is really good to see our small businesses providing that support to our Defence personnel.

The member for Drysdale talked about the schools and the great lengths that the schools in Palmerston go to in understanding the needs and requirements of those children as they are transferred from interstate to the Territory. It is great to hear that the schools are understanding those particular needs. The Good Shepherd School in Palmerston had a great initiative in the lead-up to Christmas where each student sent Christmas cards to Iraq. I was away on leave in

Newcastle at the time and saw the story on national television and thought what a great initiative. It just goes to show how well connected our community in the Territory is with our Defence personnel and those serving overseas. It was a great initiative and a great story. The member for Nelson was talking about not wanting to see a 'them and us' attitude develop as in Townsville and projects like that at the Good Shepherd School show that we are in no danger of going down that path here in the Territory.

As the member for Port Darwin said, it was great the other day to be at HMAS *Coonawarra* for the commissioning ceremony of the new Armidale Class patrol boats. It was a fabulous ceremony and HMAS *Larrakia* and HMAS *Bathurst* were ships commissioned that particular evening. It was good to see the Larrakia people out in force and the relationship that has been developed between the Larrakia people and Navy. It was very warm, very genuine, and shows the lengths that Defence are going to in becoming a part of this community. The member for Port Darwin is working very hard representing the good people at the naval base to me in government.

Member for Nelson, certainly the offer is there for a briefing for the proposed Defence support hub. There is not much detail on the table yet because we have not got that far but, certainly, all you have to do is contact my ministerial office and we will prepare a briefing for you. He mentioned it was great to see the railway being used to transport Defence equipment south for military exercises. I agree with him - but full stop after military exercises. It is okay for them to go away for exercises but it is not okay for that equipment to go away for maintenance. That is why we have released this land for the Defence support hub. I apologise to the Minister for the AustralAsian Railway but I hope we do not need to send those vehicles south for maintenance work. We are hoping to capture that work here to the detriment of the railway. However, the railway will have Bootu Creek and other freight to carry to counterbalance that loss of business.

In regards to the bus service, we are going to be entering into consultation with the Army first to really determine what the requirements are for the proposed service to the barracks. It was an election commitment. If I am not wrong in saying, all of our election commitments were timed for particular years in those commitments and I think it was for 2007-08 for Robertson Barracks. However, I will stand corrected. We are going to be consulting directly with the Army on those requirements and I cannot really answer the member's questions until that consultation occurs. It is an election commitment and we will meet it.

The member for Daly spoke about Bradshaw and yes, it is going to be a marvellous addition to the capacity of our Defence Forces to conduct military exercises here in the Northern Territory. The work that John Holland's has done has been first rate, particularly on the local content and indigenous economic development. I caught up with my good friend, Jim Davidson, for a coffee on Friday. Jim has been one of the major consulting engineers down there for John Holland and proudly told me on Friday about the work and the commitment they have made to indigenous training and employment there. Thanks, Jim, for that information which has been put into the *Hansard* tonight. John Holland has certainly been doing great things down there at Timber Creek.

The member for Katherine spoke about antisocial behaviour in Katherine. The additional resources we are putting into police, the Community Harmony Strategy, and the group there in Katherine are doing a lot of hard work. If the member for Katherine would come on board as part of the solution, as opposed to just amplifying the problem, then she would be showing some *bona fides* rather than just amplifying the problem. It has been a problem in Katherine for many years – for as long as I have been in the Territory. There are many good people in Katherine at the community level who are doing a lot of hard work to improve the situation there, along with our police force. Get on board and be part of the solution, member for Katherine.

I missed the opportunity in Question Time and talking about the Navy earlier, but we see much media focus at the moment and a lot of focus at the Commonwealth level with ministers and the Prime Minister getting behind our troops who are deployed overseas, in Iraq in particular. It is great that Commonwealth ministers acknowledge and acclaim the work that they are doing there.

However, there is another story closer to home and that is the work that our Navy is doing to our north patrolling our seas and working to secure our maritime borders, particularly from the incursion of foreign fishing vessels. They do an enormous and sterling task. Given the maps shown by my colleague, the fisheries minister, tonight, it is a bit like putting a finger in the dyke. You apprehend one vessel and there are probably another 20 that you cannot get near. They do a sterling and magnificent job and it is difficult work. It is hard work and there is enormous effort that goes in, day in, day out, from our Navy securing those maritime borders. Those officers and crew in the Navy are not getting anywhere near the amount of exposure and acknowledgement for the work that they are doing. It is hard work and people are away for long periods of time.

As Minister for Defence Support, and I am sure on behalf of this parliament, there is a lot of debate about fisheries and the lack of Commonwealth effort in securing our borders, but that by no means has implied criticism of the great job our Navy is doing. They can only do what they can with what they have. They are getting new patrol vessels and those officers and crew are doing a great job.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank everyone who has been involved in contributing to this debate tonight. I commend the statement to the House.

Motion agreed to, statement noted.

#### **MINISTERIAL STATEMENT Disease Control in the NT**

**Dr TOYNE (Health):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I advise the House on measures that are being made to control disease in the Northern Territory. In particular, I want to outline how we are responding to the new and emergency disease threats, as well as addressing longstanding disease risks that are in our Territory. This also gives me an opportunity to speak more broadly about the operations of my department's Centre for Disease Control and how our health expertise is used in a broad range of threats to public health, from communicable disease to injury prevention and environmental health.

Anyone who watches the media at the moment will be aware of the occurrence of avian flu in various parts of the world and fears of a new flu pandemic. Much of the reporting seems aimed at selling newspapers or air time rather than informing the public about the facts and the real risks. Today, I want to inform the Assembly on how my department is addressing the potential of an influenza pandemic through a realistic assessment of risk, participation in informed debate, and the development of Northern Territory and national plans.

Although the risk of a flu pandemic is relatively low, its potential impact is very large. There is no doubt that a flu pandemic would be a grave threat to public health in the Territory, in Australia and across the globe. It is critically important that we do not fall into the trap of complacency on the one hand, or panicked overreaction on the other. This means Territorians - and especially leaders in the community - need to inform themselves of the facts of the situation and the real risks.

At the moment in the world, there are two scenarios going on: the actual one is avian flu; the hypothetical one is pandemic influenza. From a human health point of view, there are two possibilities on how pandemic flu may occur. It may evolve from the current avian flu virus, or it

may come from a totally new influenza virus. The distinction between these seems to get lost in some of the reporting.

Avian flu is a disease which predominantly affects birds. Occasionally, where birds and humans closely interact it may be transmitted to humans, as we are seeing at the moment with reports from various parts of the world. So far, it appears that all cases of avian flu in humans have been contracted directly from birds - and not from other humans - and then only very infrequently. It is timely to remind Territorians that there are no current reports of avian influenza, either in birds or humans, in Australia. Although birds migrating from Asia to Australia could, potentially, carry the avian influenza virus, the experts advise this is a very low risk. Contingency planning for this has been managed by the Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines. Overall, the risk of avian influenza to Territorians is currently negligible, particularly given the absence of any sizable poultry industry in the Territory, and no evidence of risk of the introduction from migratory birds into the Northern Territory.

A flu pandemic, on the other hand, is when a new virus, for which the population as a whole has little or no immunity, is transmitted amongst humans, infecting a large proportion of those exposed. Such a virus may come from a mutative form of the H5N1 avian flu virus, or from another virus source. As far as the current avian flu outbreaks are concerned, it is only when there is direct human-to-human transmission of such a virus that there is a risk of flu pandemic. Human-to-human transmission of the current H5N1 bird flu virus has not happened yet anywhere in the world.

The risk of either the current avian flu mutating to pass sufficiently to humans, or an entirely new flu virus arising to cause a pandemic, is not easily measured. However, the effects of a flu pandemic, as we know from history, can be quite devastating. The Spanish flu pandemic of 1919 and 1920 probably killed more people than the World War I, somewhere between 20 million and 50 million people worldwide. More recently, the so-called Asian influenza of 1957 and the Hong Kong flu of 1968-69 killed around 1 million people each worldwide.

Apart from very significant morbidity and mortality, we also need to be able to deal with a depleted work force, possible disruptions of public order, and lack of community cohesion. Keeping essential services running and our health system responsive would be the key challenges. We should not underestimate the potential for social disruption, nor for an emergence of a culture of blame on particular populations or subgroups should the flu pandemic occur.

Planning and preparedness is the best way to mitigate the potentially serious consequences, both medical and social, of a new influenza pandemic. This is the basis on which our health system response to the threat is being developed. It is one I will now outline.

The Health Department and, in particular, the experts from the Centre for Disease Control, are keenly aware of the threat of avian flu and the potential for the virus to mutate, which could lead to an influenza pandemic. Planning for such an event has been going on at the national level for nearly 10 years, with our own CDC staff as active contributors to that process. The Northern Territory is an important player in the Communicable Disease Network Australia. The network provides national public health leadership and coordination for surveillance, prevention and control of communicable diseases. This includes close monitoring of the avian influenza situation in Asia, Europe and now Africa, as well as initiating general preparedness in case the virus mutates and adapts to become transmissible between humans. This has included assisting in the development of the Australian Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza, which was published in June 2005.

Locally, the Department of Health and Community Services has taken the lead role in whole-of-government pandemic planning for the development of an NT Special Counter Disaster Plan for Pandemic Influenza integrated into the Territory's well-tested current counter-disaster structures. This plan is scheduled to be complete by June this year. We already have a detailed outline of the plan and could go live tomorrow. However, the longer we have to plan, the better our preparations will be.

An NT Pandemic Influenza Planning Committee has been established as a sub-committee of the NT Counter Disaster Council. This committee is mobilising influenza planning across the whole-of-government to ensure that implementation is consistent with national and international guidelines. The council is comprised of senior representatives from the Department of Health and Community Services, Police Fire and Emergency Services, and the Chief Minister. As part of its role in keeping health professionals up to date with its latest expert advice, CDC is also issuing regular information awareness reports to all Northern Territory general practitioners, hospital medical officers, nursing staff coordinators, and pathologists. These reports give advice on detecting human cases of avian influenza, or suspicious clusters of influenza such as among health workers, plus infection control measures to be used, and general advice around the use of anti-viral drugs.

We also have a strong focus on surveillance activities to promote the early identification of possible human cases of avian influenza. The Communicable Disease Network Australia will also continue to work with public health laboratories to clarify diagnostic capacity.

It is important to again reassure Territorians that the risk of bird flu to them is currently negligible. The risk of pandemic flu is one we are taking very seriously, and we will continue to be an active player, nationally and locally, in planning for such an eventuality. Whilst there is no current risk to Territorians, it is reassuring that the expertise of the CDC staff is a key part of developing our comprehensive readiness for a pandemic influenza outbreak.

There has been some reporting about the possible introduction of infectious diseases into the Northern Territory through illegal fishers operating in our waters. These fishers may have been exposed to infectious diseases in their homelands which are not a risk in Australia because of our effective control measures. Territorians can be assured that all fishers undergo comprehensive health screening to eliminate the risk of them introducing infectious diseases into the Northern Territory. The early detection, control and treatment of diseases such as tuberculosis, malaria, sexually-transmitted infections, and influenza is essential. We are aware of an increase in the presence of unauthorised foreign fishers in our waters. My department has been called upon to provide health screening for those people who are apprehended off the northern Australian coastline. It is expected that some 1300 fishers will now be screened in the Northern Territory annually.

In response, my department has worked closely with Fisheries, the Navy, the Australian Customs Service and the federal Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, to develop a formal health assessment process that protects Australians and promotes the health and wellbeing of the fishers themselves.

In the past month, we have been successful in attracting \$1.15m in new funding from the Australian government's Customs Service to support us in providing these health assessments. This funding will greatly enhance our capacity to conduct the health assessment process in both Darwin and Nhulunbuy. In addition to funding the screening process, the money will establish five new staffing positions, shared between Darwin and Nhulunbuy, and a new demountable facility in Nhulunbuy for screening clinics, staff officers and a waiting area for fishers.

DIMIA also now requires that all unauthorised fishers undergo a fitness to travel assessment

prior to boarding a commercial airplane for the purpose of further detention or repatriation. CDC is working with the Australian Defence Force, the Immigration Detention Facilities at Baxter and Berrimah, the Berrimah Correctional Facility, and the Western Australian Department of Justice, to ensure both the smooth processing of these fishers, while ensuring that they receive high quality health care and follow-up. CDC has also worked closely with doctors at Royal Darwin Hospital, Gove Hospital and the Chest Clinic in Adelaide to ensure timely investigation and treatment of fisherpersons with suspected tuberculosis and malaria.

Whilst outlining our response to disease in the Territory, it is important to mention the rates of sexually transmitted infections, or STIs. This is often an emotive and difficult area and one where significant challenges remain. However, there has been much innovative work done here by the professionals in the Centre for Disease Control in STI diagnostics and health promotion. HIV testing in at-risk individuals and in screening settings has risen steadily. Our sexual health services are responsive and accessible. Unfortunately, it remains true that the rates of sexually transmitted infections in young people in the Northern Territory are higher than the national average, as are rates for the adults. As with all issues related to disease control, we need to ensure that we are operating on good evidence and expert advice when discussing sexually transmitted disease. This is especially true when we look at the area of STIs in children under 16 years old.

Emotive responses to such sensitive issues, especially when coupled with a desire to play politics with serious health issues, can not only miss the point, but can seriously be counterproductive. The experts advise that infections in children under 14 years of age have remained relatively stable over the past decade. However, the number of infections in 14- to 15-year-old children does appear to be increasing. While this is concerning, it is difficult to know if this is related to increased testing, earlier onset of sexual activity amongst young people, or to higher rates of sexual abuse.

The Department of Health and Community Services has drafted guidelines for clinical staff about how to respond when they come across a case of an STI in a child under 16 and these include responsibilities about reporting to police and Family and Children's Services. The guidelines have been discussed with police and are in the process of being finalised for distribution with training and support.

Let me make it perfectly clear once more that if there are any suspicions of abuse or exploitation, when we want our clinicians to refer a case to the

FACS professionals. I am confident that this response based on expert health advice and good evidence is the most appropriate and effective way to redressing what is undoubtedly a matter of concern to us all as members of the Territory community.

This highlights the role of research and evidence-based work in effectively controlling disease. As exemplified in our *Building Healthier Communities* framework, our priorities and decisions need to be based on good evidence of what works. Disease control activities undertaken in the Territory are recorded and reported, contributing to a national health knowledge base. We also provide a strong training program for undergraduate medical and nursing students from Charles Darwin University, the NT Clinical School, and Flinders Medical School, as well as to other Australian and international medical students. The Centre for Disease Control also provides placements for Masters of Applied Epidemiology and training positions for Fellows of the Faculty of Public Health Medicine with supervision and mentoring. These specialist positions contribute to the critical and practical research that identifies effective interventions that are affordable, sustainable and make best use of the resources. The expertise that we have in the Territory, and our strategic position, makes Darwin ideally placed to play a central role in disease control across northern Australia both now and in the future.

One area in particular where we have national recognition is our excellent immunisation programs. The Territory achieves immunisation coverage rates that are amongst the best in Australia and indeed, in the world. Figures from the Australian Childhood Immunisation Register of 2005 show that over 94% of children are fully immunized by their second birthday. Further, the latest report on government services demonstrates that focusing our expertise on child and maternal health is really bearing fruit. Child immunisation rates are not only high, but are actually increasing. For example, the percentage of children aged 24 months to 27 months fully immunised increased by 10.1% from June 2001 to June 2005.

Given that our population is widely dispersed over a large area, this is a considerable achievement. The NT is also a leader in the introduction of new vaccines. Work done by CDC enabled Territory children to be the first in Australia to receive Hib, hepatitis B, acellular pertussis and pneumococcal vaccines.

Our success in this area is reflected in the low incidence of most vaccine preventable diseases. Diseases for which the NT previously had very high rates such as measles and pneumococcal diseases have shown dramatic reductions in child disease burdens following the introduction of

specific vaccination programs. The Territory is also one of the first jurisdictions to introduce specific training for immunisers. Officers from CDC take an active role in immunisation program implementation and policy setting at the national level, particularly with respect to Aboriginal immunisation issues.

Our record on child immunisation is excellent. However, one of the disturbing features about the health profile of Territorians is the continuing existence of diseases that are either extremely rare, or have been eliminated in most developed nations. Rheumatic heart disease, tuberculosis and even leprosy still affect Aboriginal Territorians, and continue to be the focus of efforts of our health system.

It is important to reflect, that while the national and international debate about possible pandemic influenza goes on, Australia has suffered disease pandemics already. I refer in particular to those following the arrival of Europeans on the continent. Europeans brought with them diseases such as measles, whooping cough, mumps, chicken pox, and, of course, influenza, to which the Aboriginal population of Australia had little or no natural immunity. These diseases swept through and devastated Aboriginal society, often ahead of the arrival of the Europeans themselves. How many died in these pandemics will probably never be known, but we are talking about tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands of people. How this was reflected in the Northern Territory is unknown. We can be certain that it profoundly affected the Aboriginal community, and killed thousands of men, women and children during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Fortunately, both medical science and our reaction to the threat of disease have moved on since those days. Today, a particular focus on the control of communicable disease is in the area of surveillance. Disease surveillance was streamlined in 2004 with the introduction of the new notifiable diseases surveillance system. This was built using web site technology, and was the first jurisdictional web-based surveillance system for notifiable diseases in Australia. A centralised real time system means that data analysis is up to the minute, and systematic reporting on notifiable diseases is updated daily. This is a valuable tool in the age of threatening emerging diseases, and enhances the capacity for outbreak control.

The CDC has demonstrated national leadership in the systematic measurement of some specific diseases common to the tropics, and to the Aboriginal population. For example, invasive pneumococcal disease, which causes a high level of disease in Aboriginal people, both young and old, has been officially notifiable in the Territory since 1995. The CDC was instrumental

in making this a nationally notifiable disease in the year 2000. The CDC director has gone on to chair the National Pneumococcal Working Party for the past six years, working to get useful national data before and after the introduction of targeted vaccine programs for Aboriginal children, and to document the very heartening complete closing of the threefold gap between the incidence of the disease in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups in the two years following the introduction of a conjugate pneumococcal vaccine.

The completeness of NT Aboriginal identifying information has directed federal funding towards other national Aboriginal programs, such as for haemophilus influenza type B, hepatitis A, and influenza vaccines, and specifically in the NT for rheumatic heart disease programs. The NT is the only jurisdiction where rotovirus is notifiable, meaning that we are uniquely poised to measure the impact of the soon to be released rotovirus vaccine as we have detailed information on cases and virus type.

In addition to the 70 national notifiable conditions, the CDC has also ensured that other important diseases are notifiable including melioidosis, acute rheumatic fever, and scrub typhus. We are well positioned to monitor the impact of any new treatment or vaccines or any changes in disease rates due to environmental climate change. These efforts are all aimed at reducing and eventually eliminating the disease burden borne by Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.

The health experts at the Centre for Disease Control continue to contribute to national approaches to disease control especially as it affects Aboriginal Australians. In addition, the CDC has a fundamental role in keeping NT health professionals informed about the management of diseases. Major activities and programs that are undertaken include:

- policy and guideline development for disease control;
- surveillance of selected communicable and non-communicable diseases;
- outbreak investigation, initiation of appropriate control measures and reporting to health professionals and the general community;
- developing, promoting and monitoring immunisation programs;
- clinical and screening services for tuberculosis, non-tuberculosis mycobacteria, leprosy, sexually

transmitted infections and blood-borne viruses including HIV and hepatitis;

- input into the Territory's renowned Preventable Chronic Diseases Strategy, maternal and child health programs, rheumatic health disease programs, and injury prevention;
- environmental health; and
- medical entomology which provides advice and carries out research, surveillance, and control of insects that affect human health.

To supplement these activities, in 2005, the CDC embarked on a project called Strengthening the Links with the aim of improving the exchange of information on public health issues between the CDC and general practitioners in the Northern Territory. The project will enhance knowledge of and use of these resources, as well as making GPs comfortable with contacting the CDC for information and direction, and to alert the CDC when unusual or potential disease outbreaks occur.

In collaboration with the Top End Division of General Practice, between September and December 2005, the CDC medical and nursing staff visited nearly 60 GPs in Darwin. The visits provided an opportunity for GPs to discuss public health issues relevant to their practice on a one-to-one basis. This innovative approach to fostering CDC communication and working relationships in the primary care health sector was very well received. The program has been expanded to Alice Springs and remote areas of the Territory. This is another example of collaboration of government and non-government sectors in the provision of health services for Territorians.

Our disease control experts not only make important contributions nationally and locally, but many have also high levels of expertise in specialty areas making them essential in international disaster response and public health management. For example, CDC staff provided assistance advice to the Northern Territory Police and Defence on health preparations for personnel deployed to Aceh and Thailand immediately after the Asian tsunami. Staff from the CDC volunteered in Aceh to assist the international response in respect to public health and primary health care. During the SARS epidemic, CDC staff took leave to serve Pacific island nations to review and instruct on infection control issues.

Specialised staff from CDC have also worked as part of the international humanitarian response in environmental health in Sudan, served on WHO Global and Western Pacific TB technical advisory

committees, carried out TB control missions in Indonesia, and mosquito management in Timor-Leste, assisted in the prevention of transmission of HIV in the Solomon Islands, and in public health and sanitation in China. They are instrumental in developing stronger links with training personnel, and building healthier communities in our Asian and Pacific neighbours.

To return to the Territory for a moment, I would like to highlight, in particular, our efforts to protect Territorians from mosquito-borne diseases. On the night of 22 February 2004, two surveillance traps in Tennant Creek captured the dengue mosquito, *Aedes aegypti*. This mosquito is a major vector of dengue in tropical and sub-tropical regions of the world. *Aedes aegypti* is common in far north Queensland, but has not been endemic in any Territory community for about 50 years. The Medical Entomology Branch and other CDC staff acted immediately. Within days, officers were on the ground in Tennant Creek to determine the extent to which the mosquito had become established and to start a program of intensive survey and treatment of all the town's properties in an attempt to eradicate it. In the seven weeks that followed, 89 properties in the Tennant Creek area were found to have breeding sites for the dengue mosquito. Nearby communities in the Barkly region were also surveyed, but none were detected.

The extent and effectiveness of the initial control program was made possible by the assistance of Defence personnel, interstate colleagues from Western Australia and colleagues from Queensland Health. This led to a successful argument to fully eradicate *Aedes aegypti* from Tennant Creek. In June 2004, the Australian government's Department of Health and Ageing funded \$1m to carry out the full eradication project in the Barkly. The Dengue Mosquito Eradication Project commenced immediately with the appointment of a project manager. At its largest, the project employed up to 13 full-time staff.

Dry Season surveillance activities in 2004 showed that the initial control effort had not managed to eradicate the mosquito entirely from Tennant Creek. In November 2004, the team systematically surveyed and, once more, treated every property in the town. There have been five complete rounds of property inspections in Tennant Creek since November 2004, over 5500 inspections in total, and 17 other Northern Territory communities have been extensively surveyed for the dengue mosquito in that same period.

These great efforts have worked; the dengue mosquito has not been detected in Tennant Creek since December 2004, and has not been detected in any other community in the Northern Territory.

There can be no doubt that the swift action of the Entomology Branch managed to minimise *Aedes aegypti* in the town and prevented its spread to other communities in the Northern Territory. The Dengue Control Project is an excellent example of the work of the CDC in tackling the threat of communicable diseases in the Territory.

The CDC can also boast achievements in other important areas. I would like to mention in particular the area of injury prevention. Injury in the Northern Territory is a major cause of both death and disability. Injury includes a very broad range of events - transport accidents, suicide, personal violence, workplace injuries, falls, sports injuries, and drowning. The majority of these deaths are preventable. Injury is the third leading cause of death, and second in the case of Aboriginal people, responsible for 17% of all deaths in the Northern Territory. This compares with only 6% Australia-wide. Injury can affect all sectors of society and a multitude of factors contribute to the occurrence of injury.

Perhaps more than any other public health issue, addressing injury requires coordinated action from a broad range of sectors. This includes crime prevention, domestic violence, suicide prevention, falls prevention, child safety, and road and water safety. The Safety and Injury Unit of CDC aims to link these various agencies together, foster greater collaboration, and bring substantial public health expertise to the table.

This very important and exciting initiative will see the Department of Health and Community Services and the Office of Crime Prevention support the City of Palmerston to develop a Palmerston Safe Communities Program using the World Health Organisation's Safe Community Model. This will engage the community and a broad range of government and non-government agencies to make Palmerston a healthier and safer community.

The health of our community is further enhanced through the essential front-line work adopted by the Environmental Health Program. It works towards health-promoting environments and better health outcomes. Every year, the Environmental Health Hotline receives hundreds of calls from Territorians on a wide range of issues, from food poisoning, reports of unsanitary conditions, to requests for health education and environmental health promotion materials.

In recent years, the program has undertaken a significant legislative review program starting with the new *Food Act* and the *Radiation Protection Act 2004*. A new Public and Environmental Health Act and Medicines and Poisons Act are also being considered. The introduction of this legislation will

result in updated proactive public health legislation meeting the modern day needs of Territorians.

The environmental health program also provides training and employment opportunities for a range of health practitioners. Building the environmental health capacity of communities is pursued through the Aboriginal Environmental Health Worker Program. Student placements are also available through ongoing relationships with Flinders University, Swinburne University, and the University of Bordeaux.

In conclusion, through the activities of our health system in general, and the expertise of the CDC in particular, we are addressing emerging disease threats such as pandemic flu. We are also continuing to tackle those diseases which once were worldwide and had devastating effects on health. The control of these diseases remains a demonstration of our capacity and ability to minimise the threats posed by major infectious disease. We can be confident that the control of emerging and ongoing communicable disease is strongly supported in the Northern Territory. It is based on solid research and evidence, and led by teams of committed and talented professionals who continue to network effectively with all practitioners in our community and beyond.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly take note of the statement.

**Dr LIM (Greatorex):** Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for bringing this statement to the House. The Centre for Disease Control is the unsung hero of health care in the Territory. Those who have not known about the CDC will now realise the wide range of activities this department undertakes to provide us with the best health environment that we can possibly have and afford. From the aspects of disease prevention to collection to data, to then develop processes where we can help to create measures to remedy situations, this centre has a huge impact on our daily lives. The umbrella effect it has on our health merits all the praise we can possibly give to the staff of the centre.

The minister spoke about avian flu. I am glad to see that whilst recognising the potential devastation to the Northern Territory he is not being panicked by the hype in the media, nor is he complacent. I am pleased to see that the CDC is obviously watching the disease as it spreads across Europe and whether it will come down to the southern hemisphere. It is fortunate for us that the island of Australia is surrounded by a large moat. You would assume that any migratory bird affected by avian flu would not be too well and, in its attempts to migrate to the south, might not quite make landfall. That would at least get rid of the potential of avian flu getting into our country.

However, New Guinea is not very far from the tip of Queensland so there is always the potential.

Avian flu, as the minister mentioned, is a disease of birds. It does not necessarily mean that humans will catch it - unless you are in very close proximity and in constant contact with infected birds. Even if you are in contact with infected birds, it is not likely that a human will pick up avian flu, as avian flu is for birds and human beings are not birds. However, there are instances when humans are immunosuppressed, or have decreased immunity because of their personal health due to diabetes or other medical conditions, which may compromise their immunity. It is then likely that these people could pick up and succumb to avian flu. That is not cause for alarm because the virus that causes avian flu does not inherently infect humans.

However, if that virus was to mutate, whether through combination with a human flu virus or in any other process, then there would be reason to be concerned. If a human flu virus picks up the infectivity of the avian flu virus, then there is a huge potential to cause grave danger to human beings. The Northern Territory is a good place to be in if such a pandemic ever occurs in the southern hemisphere as it is a place that has few people, good ventilation, and good fresh air. Do not stay in crowded places, and it is very likely that you might not pick up avian flu.

While the preparations are in order and well advanced in the Northern Territory and our CDC is in constant communication with the national and international bodies about the progress of this disease, I have not heard the government say what it intends to do in the event of such a pandemic in the Northern Territory. I know that Queensland has already given an unequivocal guarantee that it will provide supplies of Tamiflu or Relenza to all Queenslanders in the event of a pandemic affecting Queensland.

Perhaps the Northern Territory government would likewise reassure Territorians that in the event of such a pandemic every Territorian will receive the appropriate medication to prevent or cure them of an early infection. Once the infection goes on, other medical therapies would have to be used. With medications such as Tamiflu and Relenza, you take them early in the course of the illness to try to prevent a severe onset of the illness. If that is a guarantee that the Northern Territory government can make, then I believe Territorians will be better assured that we can be protected from such a pandemic.

With the foreign fishing boats coming into our waters and fishers coming onto land, it is evident from previous debates and also from what the minister has said, that the federal government is

very much involved in this. It is very conscious of the issues of infections coming into this country. The fact that the Customs Service and Immigration and Coastwatch are all talking to each other and jointly preparing themselves for any such incursions is good. That the CDC is able to provide health services to screen foreign individuals who come in illegally, will obviously provide us with a very good filter to prevent illnesses from coming into the country. The boats that these people come in would also be a host or a home to many undesirable creatures, insects or pathogens of one kind or another. If the CDC is acutely aware of these then our protection will be almost guaranteed.

One of the issues that really concerns me is about sexually transmitted infections. I was very disturbed when, in the newspapers a couple of weeks ago, the Chief Executive Officer of the Department of Health was quoted saying that almost 400 Territory children under the age of 13, and more than 1500 aged between 14 and 15, have been diagnosed with sexually transmitted diseases in the past decade. When you look through the annual reports of the Health Department, indeed, numbers have been gradually going up. The minister advised that, amongst children under 14 years of age, the figures have been relatively constant. However, infections of children between 14 and 15 years of age have been increasing. That is a concern.

These are under-age children. It does not matter whether it is because of increased testing, early onset of sexual activity, or for whatever reason. These are under-age children we have deemed to be unable to make proper judgments to participate in sexual activity. Whatever the moral issues in that, let us talk about people we deem are under age. If they are contracting sexually transmitted infections, there is only one way. You cannot get it from the toilet seat; you get it because you have participated in sexual activity, voluntarily or involuntarily. Something has to be done. I will quote from the minister's statement:

*While this is concerning, it is difficult to know if this is related to increased testing, earlier onset of sexual activity amongst young people, or to higher rates of sexual abuse.*

I ask the minister: what are you doing about that? What investigations are you doing? You cannot ask the question; you have to know, and you have to ensure that your department investigates every case that is found or tested to be positive – then you would know how these children came to be infected.

The figures that the CEO quotes are absolutely unacceptable. When children as young as eight

are getting STIs, then we have a real problem. I recall when I was a full-time clinician, I had to report every case of every child abuse that I suspected. The minister tries to emphasise that it is important, yet his words do not appear to be as firm as his desire. I quote his words:

*Let me make it perfectly clear once more that if there are any suspicions of abuse or exploitation, when we want our clinicians to refer a case to the FACS professionals.*

Our clinicians? Everybody is responsible for that; our clinicians have had mandatory reporting for decades. It is important that anyone who suspects child abuse, or a child being exploited, must report that instance immediately. Failing to do that means we fail our children. The minister, I see, shakes his head. I might have misinterpreted his intent, but I know that ministerial statements are written with very specific words in mind. If it is loosely written, then the minister needs to ensure that his speech writers write it a little tighter. What is said in here by the minister is that currently the system does not police mandatory reporting and does not penalise anyone who is aware of child abuse and does not report it.

I am concerned, of course. When you look at the figures of STIs and how many cases have been reported, and whether children have been fully investigated, it is a concern. I raised this issue a few weeks ago. On page 92 of the 2004-05 annual report of the Health Department, where it is talking about child harm, it is an indication that many children are not being investigated. An assessment over a telephone is not an investigation. I know for a fact, because I have been told by people who have reported it to FACS that their phone calls are never followed up, that, in fact, FACS ignored or treated their phone calls with a fairly dismissive attitude.

**Ms Lawrie:** What a lot of rubbish.

**Dr LIM:** The minister interjects: 'What a lot of rubbish'.

**Ms Lawrie:** Absolutely.

**Dr LIM:** Then she can meet with the people out there in the public, say it out loud ...

**Ms Lawrie:** Give me their names and I will.

**Mr Deputy SPEAKER:** Order, order!

**Dr LIM:** ... that there complaints are always investigated. In her own words ...

**Ms Lawrie:** Give me there names and I will ...

**Dr LIM:** In her own words, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Ms Lawrie:** Put it on the record.

**Mr Deputy SPEAKER:** Order!

**Dr LIM:** In her own words, Mr Deputy Speaker, when she was interviewed by the media she said: 'They are assessed', not investigated. They are quite different words, and she used those words quite distinctively as well. She knows what she is talking about and she tries to play politics.

What I am saying is, it is important for every child suspected of suffering from child abuse to be investigated fully. It is important; it is our responsibility to do that, and every mother, every father, would like to see their child protected. We need to investigate these cases to ensure that you can bring the full weight of the law against anybody who even attempts to do such a thing to our children.

I was quite pleased to see the rate of immunisation of Northern Territory children. I believe it is a real feather in the cap for the Territory to have such high rates of immunisations being conducted amongst our children. I saw a graph in the annual report which indicated that our immunisation rates are well above that of the country. It would be good if we can achieve 100% immunisation. I can imagine, especially for young children, babies living in the bush, that if they were immunised they would be better protected from the diseases that they are so exposed to compared to children living in urban areas. We recognise that the Northern Territory is a big place and it is hard to track down every person, and because people are also very mobile there will be a certain percentage which will slip through the net.

However, we must make every effort to ensure that we achieve 100% immunisation. There are now immunisation regimes that commence at birth. At least we know that just about every delivery is conducted within a health centre, or clinic or hospital setting, so these babies could commence their vaccinations, or immunisations, very early, and we should do that.

Looking at page 124 of the annual report regarding illnesses such as rheumatic fever and such like, they continue to be a concern. The cases notified have remained relatively unchanged for the last four or five years, and we must do better to try to ensure that every case is captured and treated so that we do not end up with what we see today is an increase in incidence of renal diseases. These are the rheumatic fevers, the post streptococcal glomerulonephritis. Such infections are the precursors to chronic renal failure which requires dialysis. If we can prevent

the occurrence of such things early it will then prevent the escalating cost of providing renal dialysis in the Northern Territory.

It comes down to where the minister was talking about not so much disease control as environment control and environmental health. He talks about not only food poisoning, but about unsanitary conditions, health education, and environmental health promotion. These are the things that need to be done on a very regular basis. I would expect the Northern Territory government to resource the centre adequately so that it can perform these tasks, because this is the front end of anything to do with health care. If we can prevent diseases from occurring, then we will benefit in the later stage with a lot less expenditure in treating chronic illnesses that have been allowed to develop over decades of poor hygiene, poor care, poor nutrition and exposure to high loads of infection and other contaminants within the environment that causes the problems.

The communication that the CDC has with the health professionals in the Territory is good. They send out regular bulletins which I receive and do read. It is very informative and it keeps the health professional in the Territory well informed and provides the conduit for the health professional to then come back to the CDC to seek clarification or extra information, and sometimes even further instruction as to how we can proceed with one disease or another in terms of control and treatment. It is also good that it provides the CDC with an opportunity to find out first-hand and early about any outbreak that it might have to deal with.

I do not have very much time left, but I would like to come back to some of the STIs that have been reported in the annual report of the Health department for 2004-05. I trust that it is just a typo and nothing more, and I ask the minister to get his department to clarify that when he responds to this debate. On page 123 of his department's report, hepatitis C cases were reported through the years 1999 to 2004: 1999, 196 cases; 2000, 183 cases; 2001, 213 cases; 2002, 202 cases; 2003, 216 cases, and in 2004 only one case. I do not think that figure is believable.

Then I happened to be flicking through the report and came across some other figures about hepatitis C between years 2000-01 to 2004-05, and those figures do not match up entirely with the figures on page 123. On page 22 of the report, for the year 2000-01 there were 213 cases. It matches up with the table on page 123. For 2001-02, page 42 says 200 cases, page 123 says 202 cases. 2002-03, on page 42 is 214 and on page 123 it is 216; and then on page 22, for 2003-04 is 246 and page 123 it is 1; then on page 42 for 2004-05 is 306 and we do not have that column on page 123. There is an increasing

incidence of hepatitis C in the Territory. The minister, while he spoke about hepatitis C as one of the issues of concern, did not describe what the CDC or his government has, in fact, been doing to try to somehow hold back the increase of this illness which eventually is going to be fatal; it will kill people and they will die a lot younger than they would otherwise.

I am glad that HIV is well controlled. However, we are not certain of that because HIV and hepatitis C are two diseases that tend to go side by side. In this instance, HIV is well controlled whilst hepatitis C is not. There are some issues there, minister, and I hope in your response you explain what the go is.

The story with chlamydia and gonorrhoea is just as scary because they are both increasing quite rapidly in the Northern Territory. Either our message on protection from sexually transmitted diseases is not well done, or we are not getting the message across sufficiently. I do not know as much about Darwin's television, but on Imparja television we have Cuz Congress in his superman suit and in his condom advertisements. They were very effective - humorous yet effective - and I wonder whether such ads are being run here in Darwin. If not, perhaps it is something that this government ought to seriously consider and fund so that we can get the message across the Territory seeing that these diseases, particularly gonorrhoea and chlamydia, are on the increase and people need to protect themselves from it. Otherwise, it is just going to get worse.

Minister, I commend you on your statement. As I said earlier, the Centre for Disease Control is the unsung hero of the health service. The staff have done a fantastic job since its inception, and I look forward to them doing a good job and continuing to communicate their expertise and services to all Territory health professionals so that they feel comfortable liaising with them and using the CDC as a major health resource.

Finally, in the last minute, as I was flicking through I noticed one highlight here that I have not spoken about. It is about rotovirus, which is notifiable. If it is notifiable, minister – it has been notifiable for a while now – I am surprised that you do not know when a rotovirus epidemic is going to occur. You should know when it is going to occur. You have enough warnings and, therefore, you should be able to staff your hospitals to meet the demands of the patient load when there is a rotovirus epidemic.

Debate adjourned.

## ADJOURNMENT

**Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister):** Madam Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

It is with great sadness that I inform the Chamber of the passing of a true Territorian, Colin Tyrell, or 'Tall Tale Tex', as he was more widely known. Tex passed away on 25 January at his home on the Gold Coast after a short battle with lung cancer. Tex lived in the Territory for over 30 years, leaving in 1974, but is still widely remembered by many of the Territory's long-term residents.

Tex was a tattooist and, as you would expect, was heavily tattooed himself from head to toe. His business took him all over the Territory, and it was often said you could run into Tex anywhere between Darwin and Alice Springs. Tex was trained in Sydney and owned a tattoo parlour in Roma Street, Brisbane, before moving north. During his time in the Territory, he fell in love with Darwin and eventually settled here in the 1960s. He became a successful businessman running Tyrrell's Secondhand Shop in Cavenagh Street from the mid-1960s, as well as a magic shop.

Tex was best known for his great passion and talent, which was yarn spinning. Tex loved to spin a yarn and he became the Territory's talking champion in 1954 when he defeated Tennant Creek's own 'Walkie Talkie' Lloyd Nelson at the historic Stuart Arms Hotel in Alice Springs. People who were there and witnessed the contest claimed that 'Walkie Talkie' was the firm favourite because, apparently, he never shut up. Tex was the underdog. It was a civilised affair and the rules were simple: no shouting down the opponent; points allotted for intelligent lies and deducted for childish ones; points deducted for lengthy silences; when one contestant leaves the bar the other must accompany him and continue talking non-stop until they return; and, most importantly, beer had to be drunk at regular intervals.

The showdown began at 2 pm and Tex demoralised 'Walkie Talkie' with his seemingly endless supply of stories. He had him well and truly beaten after three hours, prompting 'Walkie Talkie' to plead with people to get Tex to stop talking. Tex claimed he was on a roll, so he would continue to talk, and was rewarded when he spotted a visiting parliamentary delegate whom he challenged and duly despatched in 10 minutes. He was finally stopped when the pub closed at 10 pm. That is not bad, from a 2 pm start!

Tex became a minor celebrity with his status as Yarn Spinning Champion and was always up for a challenge. The high point came in 1967 when he issued an open challenge for the title of Australian

Yarn Spinning Champion. The first prize was a tape recorder and a golden shovel. His challenge was accepted by renowned author, Frank Hardy, who travelled to Darwin for the event. The lead-up to the event was one of great humour. Firstly, Frank insured his voice against catching a cold, bronchitis or laryngitis. Not to be outdone, Tex also took out insurance, this time against Frank's 'pipe thrusts as he talked animatedly'. He then went a step further to acquire some perfumed throat spray for the event.

The Yarn Spinning Championship attracted quite a bit of media attention and the locals turned up in force at the Darwin Hotel. Both men spun 20 yarns each, but the end came just after Tex delivered an impressive 21-minute yarn. However, he lost his train of thought and drew a blank when it came time for his next yarn. Although the title went to Frank, Tex did the Territory proud.

Tex would continue to participate in yarn spinning competitions, and appeared on Darwin's first ever telethon in 1971 to spin a few yarns. Even after he left Darwin, he would return regularly for yarn spinning competitions, his last being in 1994.

Tex's wife, Lola, passed away in 1997, and he is survived by his three children, Colin, Leanne and Robyn, and three grandchildren, Tyler, Maddison, and Phoebe. Our thoughts are with them. Another legendary Territorian bites the dust, but he probably went down talking.

I would like to recognise tonight the efforts of the team who run the St Vincent de Paul shop, welfare centre and shelter in Stuart Park. Their work in helping and supporting those in need is inspirational. Marilyn Fitzpatrick is the manager of the shop and welfare centre. She has been in the role for two years, after spending four years as a volunteer. Before that, she worked in the courts, visiting the Territory with the Family Court as far back as 1977. The St Vinnies centre at Stuart Park provides emergency relief and the shop stocks clothing, home wares, and even some antiques. It is open Monday to Saturday and Marilyn has found a team of around 20 volunteers. They are a diverse group – Kathy, who arrived in Darwin from Northern Ireland 38 years ago, has been with St Vinnies, as she puts it, for donkey's years, while Bev has been volunteering for a little over a year now.

Next door to the shop and welfare centre is Ozanam House, which was previously a men's shelter but is now open to anyone. The shelter provides breakfast and lunch seven days a week, as well as case management. Donna Webb is the coordinator of the shelter and has been in the job for six months. She has a team of around 13 volunteers, some of whom are clients or

ex-clients. The shelter helps people learn new skills. For example, a volunteer driver is assisted in achieving his H endorsement, while other people learn skills such as cooking. An old bedroom has been converted into a classroom, and literacy and numeracy courses are on the agenda, as are art programs, an indigenous AA group, and a group for mums and babies. Services such as Centrelink and Community Legal Services visit the shelter weekly.

I acknowledge the hard work of Marilyn and Donna and their marvellous team of volunteers. On behalf of all of us, thank you.

On 6 February, the Queen's Baton, which is en route to the Commonwealth Games in Melbourne, arrived in the Northern Territory. Many Territorians had the honour of running, or walking, with the baton through their communities. I was thrilled to be able to carry the baton into the special function we held here at Parliament House. The relay began at Buckingham Palace in London last March, and will have travelled more than 180 000 km by the time it gets to Melbourne. It has visited 71 nations of the Commonwealth, making it the world's longest and most inclusive relay. In fact, it is the only games relay to have visited all member nations.

The baton arrived in Alice Springs on 6 February, and a runner carried it up to Anzac Hill, the most visited tourist attraction in Alice Springs. It then got to travel in luxury, boarding The Ghan on its way to Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin, and I have been assured it did travel Gold Kangaroo Class. It has been an exciting time for many of our communities and I now want to make special mention of all the Territorians who were members of our relay team.

In Alice Springs, the team was: Barry Byerley, Sarah Chunys, Ian Conway, Nathan Craig, Alistair Feehan, Barbara Geraghty, Justin Harbour, Joan Higgins, Max Horton, Wayne Kraft, Mary Meldrum, Mary Miles, Barry Nicholls, Andrew Pearce, Sue Ride, Damien Ryan, Emma Smith, Stephen Smith, Murray Stewart, Graham Stinson, Eric Sultan, Pippa Tessmann, Chris Tudor, Randle Walker and Beth Williams.

These people ran with the baton in Katherine: Colin Beard, Maureen Brittin, Sean Cooke, Neil Davies, Jann Goodworth, Anne Hammond, Katrina Hayward, Corey Heath, Steven Kelly, Simon Kennedy, Clare Labowitch, Benjamin Martin, Max Morris, Marcus Rosas, Werner Sarny, Toni Tapp-Coutts, Tony Tilley and Susan Tulley.

In Darwin and Palmerston our runners were: Joyce Deering, Gavin Murphy, Amelia Samuels, Geoffrey Samuels, Owen Samuels, Heimo Schober, Kamini Warden, Erika Jankovic, Terry

Mills MLA, Chris Natt MLA, Robert Naumann, Emanuel Siritotis, Helen Taylor, Carolyn Cendo, Jack Hughes, Sonda Turner Nampijimpa, Keith Williams, Sue Bradley, Paul Dale, Shane Hall, Fiona Halliday, Sophie Hawken, Damien Smith, Neil Sutherland, Linda Shepherdson, Sharyn Smith, Iain Summers, Clifford Duncan, Fran Potter, Judith Lee O'Hearn, Doug Parrish, Rick Paul, Laura Wilson, Annette Burke, Bernadette Devine, Pamela MacLeod, Peter Wright, Tessa Cunningham, Elaine Holmes, Len Notaras, Leonora Billias, Chris Burns MLA, Barb Duminski, Shane Hall, Jason Ivanson, Judith Joyce, Roderick Joyce, Michael Long, Beryl McIntosh, Paul Mitchiner, Kevin Moloney, Lisa Naumann, Gary Quinn and Beverley Sinclair.

Congratulations to everyone and to all the people who lined the streets to cheer on the runners. I am sure the three mentioned in here did us all proud on behalf of each and every one of us.

**Mr Wood:** Come to Litchfield, that would be nice.

**Ms MARTIN:** Next time, when the member for Nelson speaks to the Queen about where it goes, it can go to Litchfield. It went past in the train. The very best of luck to our athletes competing in Melbourne. I know that they will do us proud.

I would now like to talk about something entirely different which is the NT Wedding Spectacular. Local businesswoman, Leonie Hudson, has many things on the go. She runs the Magic Party Shop in Parap and Settings Functions Decorators at Coconut Grove, and is also the brains behind the NT Wedding Spectacular. The inaugural spectacular was held in 2005 and over 3000 people came along. That success spurred Leonie into making the 2006 Wedding Spectacular even bigger and better than the first event.

The spectacular will be held in the Foskey Pavilion at the show grounds this weekend, 18 and 19 February, and will be supported by Helen Wilson from Crowne Plaza Darwin and Jane Miles from Creative Jewellers. There will be nearly 70 booths from businesses around the Territory including suit hire, cakes, celebrants, car hire, photography and function hire. There will also be fashion parades as well as prizes and give-a-ways. The highlight of the event will be a wedding on stage on the Sunday afternoon. Hundreds of people applied to win the 'dream wedding', which was run by Mix FM, and it came down to three short-listed couples.

On Valentine's Day, the winners were announced on Mix with Justin Alteras and Michelle Bennetts the lucky couple winning by a mere 60 votes - and they certainly are a very lucky couple. Local businesses have donated a wide

range of goods and services for their wedding: Crowne Plaza Darwin will provide a fully catered reception; Creative Jewellers have supplied the rings; Fairy Tale Designs and Country Classics in Parap have donated a wedding gown and dresses for bridesmaids; Vanity Hair and Beauty will do the wedding party's hair; Jennifer Heath from Travel World has organised the honeymoon; and Leonie's business, Settings, will provide the decorations.

It is expected that people from as far as Alice Springs, Broome and North Queensland will travel to Darwin for the spectacular. Leonie is hoping that in the near future we can attract Japanese couples to get married here. Not only does Leonie run several businesses but she also has a family - husband, Michael, and four children, nine-year-old twins Emily and Michala, seven-year-old Brooke, and four-year-old Thomas. She is certainly a busy woman and I wish her all the very best of luck for this weekend.

**Mr VATSKALIS (Casuarina):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, Gong Xi Fa Cai. to everyone! Welcome to the Year of the Dog, the Chinese New Year. I was delighted once again to have my electorate office blessed last Saturday for the commencement of another prosperous Chinese year. I was also fortunate enough to attend the Chung Wah Society's Chinese New Year banquet dinner on 5 February.

Once again, the members of the Chung Wah Society put on a fantastic and fine night for their guests. The Lion Dance Troupe, as always, was very impressive with their leaps and gymnastic performances. I understand that there are many new members of the troupe this year and I would like to acknowledge them personally. At the function the performers were Wayne Lo, Shaun Pearson, Steven Pearson, Victor Jong, Zac Chan, Rohan Chin, Warren Wong and Nathan Tam. As these boys were, in fact, in Alice Springs on Tuesday conducting the blessing of the business down there, the troupe that joined us in the Chamber on Tuesday were Daryl Chin, Andrew Chin, Roland Chin, Des Yuen, Nick Brown, Edward Chin and Sean Moo.

At the banquet dinner we were treated to fine performances by the Chun Lian Dancers. These young ladies performed graceful and flowing traditional Chinese dances, once again trained by Ms Rosalie Hiah who was brought to Darwin to train the girls with the assistance of a grant through our Office of Multicultural Affairs. The dancers were Mikayla Chin, Kaitlin Chin, Alexandria Chin, Georgia Chin, Madeline Chin, Jessica Chin, Courtney Chin, Rochelle Chin and Brooke Chin and no, they were not all sisters.

There was more excitement from the Jow Gar Martial Art Troupe led by instructor Vernon Lowe, son of Adam Lowe, the President of the Chung Wah Society, and experienced martial arts practitioner. Owen Chin, Edward Tsang, Edward Chin and Andrew Chin put on a choreographed display of hand-to-hand fighting and sword play.

The highlight of the event was, however, the official launch of a new book written about the Darwin Chinese temple, titled *Hall of the Ranking Sages, Darwin, Northern Territory*, it is the fourth volume in a series on Chinese temples in Australia written by Dr Kok Hu Jin. The book is a meticulous documentation of the Chung Wah Society's temple in Woods Street, and provides primary information about some aspects of Chinese history in the Northern Territory not previously touched on by historians.

The Chinese community of Darwin is well organised, well respected and valued for the contribution they make to our city. We thank them for sharing their culture with the rest of us, the non-Chinese Territorians.

I would like to speak of one of my constituents, Mrs Indrani Doloswala, who was a finalist in the Australian of the Year Award 2005 in the Northern Territory. The Award was handed to her here on 24 November 2005. Indrani has been recognised for the work she does, and has done, with helping everyone in the wider community, including children, migrants and their children, and her tsunami relief efforts. She is a qualified counsellor, and is a Cultural Inclusion Advisor to Early Childhood Australia, and is involved actively on many committees and organisations such as the Family and Community Services Advisory Council, the Multicultural Council NT, the Police Ethnic Advisory Group, the Sri Lankan Friendship Association, the Ionian Club of Darwin, and the Women's International Club.

I would like to read the speech that Indrani gave that night:

*Thank you, thank you. By birth, I am a Sri Lankan, and by choice I became an Australian. I am very happy that I made that choice. That has given me encouragement, a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment. I portray myself as a blend of east and west.*

*Let me tell you a little bit about me. I came to Australia as a diplomat's wife, and became a widow at a young age. I had the daunting task of bringing up my two children on my own. Today, I am the proud mother of two high achievers and two beautiful grandchildren.*

*My daughter, Kanchana, became a chemical engineer, and married Greg Bishop, and has two beautiful girls. My son, Navin, is an economist. My family and friends have given me encouragement and support to get involved in community work which is close to my heart.*

*My passion for migrant wellbeing started 30 years ago in Australia. I like to help the migrant community, whether they are early settlers, refugees, international students and their families, women and children, youth and elderly, to adjust and involve themselves in their chosen country, at the same time, keep their cultural identity and language. I have been doing this in Darwin also.*

*I thank the Australia Day Council for giving me the honour of selecting me and also thank the other nominees who all have amazing stories to tell. Christmas is not far away and I would like to wish you all a merry Christmas and happy 2006. Thank you so much. Ayubowan.*

That is an excellent speech. This is a speech directly from the heart. Indrani has always been involved with migrant societies. She has done an excellent job, and I am very privileged to consider her as a very close friend. Thank you, Indrani, for being nominated; that nomination does not just reflect on you, it reflects on every Australian, especially non-English speaking background Australians, who came from somewhere else, and made Australia their home.

I congratulate a very special place in Casuarina and that is the Tracy Village Sports and Social Club, which celebrated their 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in November last year with a whole week of entertainment and promotions. I was extremely honoured to cut the cake along with longstanding president, Gary Ross.

In September 2004, Paul Henderson, the member for Wanguri, and I, proudly handed over to the club the title deed to the land it stands on. We have enjoyed working closely with the president, Gary Ross and manager, John Quinlan, and its dedicated committee and staff. Congratulations to you all for your hard work and dedication to the club.

Tracy Village Sports and Social Club was originally built in 1975 to provide a social environment for hundreds of tradesmen, professionals and labourers who came to help rebuild Darwin after Cyclone Tracy. Today, the club is recognised as one of the friendliest social, sports and family-oriented clubs in Darwin. It has

gone from strength to strength and boasts over 3200 members from right around the country.

Its many features and facilities provide a very good environment, not only for individuals, but also for the whole family. On Friday nights, you can be entertained with live music by well known local and interstate bands. There is also a bistro, beer garden and gaming rooms, children's entertainment, games room, and the club is affiliated with eight different sporting clubs offering sports for junior and senior players.

The club looks fabulous with new changes around the grounds. The development of the new cricket nets, storage sheds, and the new baseball and softball field are fantastic. With a Northern Territory government grant to be provided for lights, the club is going to go from strength to strength and has to be one of the best clubs in the Northern Territory. It is a wonderful club in the northern suburbs that has been very active in the local community. They keep on investing in the sporting and social facilities for the people in the northern suburbs and, with the exciting new Lyons development commencing on its doorstep, you can be sure that the club will get bigger and better.

If you have not visited it yet, you do not know what you are missing. It is very reasonably priced, especially the Sunday night roast dinner for \$10. It is very good idea to take the family out. Friday night is very friendly with live entertainment and dancing. Member for Nelson, if you want to come down ...

**Mr Wood:** I am getting hungry already.

**Mr VATSKALIS:** That is very good. If you want to join the club it is only \$5 for membership.

Congratulations to president, Gary Ross, and the committee. They are going to have my and my colleague, for member for Wanguri's support for the next four years.

I would like to farewell and give sincere thanks to a very special person, Mick Reed, from the Casuarina Police Station for the support and assistance he provided in my electorate. I wish him all the best for the future. I have to say that Mick Reed was always approachable, always there, and always responded to our requests. He had a very friendly manner. On many occasions, he had to personally attend to some of the disputes and always did so without any problem. I understand that Mick Reed was staying in Katherine when the floods were happening, and I believe people speak very highly of him. I speak very highly of Mick Reed. He was very good. Many of initiatives that he instigated in Casuarina paid dividends for all Casuarina residents.

I would also like to welcome Matt Hollamby, the new Superintendent of Casuarina Division, and Tim Moseley, the new Office-in-Charge of Casuarina Police Station. I look forward working closely with them to make the Casuarina electorate a safe and a happy place to live.

I am very happy to advise that the community partnership is definitely working well in my electorate. I thank patrol officers from the Casuarina Police Station, Darwin City Council, and the Community Harmony Project; in particular the police officers who regularly drop into my office so that they can target hot spots identified by reports from constituents. They provide much-needed support and assistance, with regular patrols around identified problem areas such as suburban shopping centres, parks, school grounds, local business areas, etcetera. Concerns of antisocial behaviour, youth vandalism and numerous itinerants and other issues in the electorate have been targeted due to increased foot patrols, bike patrols, vehicle patrols, and plain clothes patrols in the area.

Police and the local members work very closely together. Whether they like it or not, local members are in the forefront of the community. We receive information on all sorts of antisocial, or even illegal, activities in the area, and very often pass them directly to the police. I have to say that Mick Reed was one of the people who responded immediately to any request. We did not have to go through formal channels. He relied upon e-mail and would act immediately. Good luck, Mick, wherever you go.

I have to say every Officer-in-Charge in Casuarina has gone to bigger and better things. Two of them are in Alice Springs - Murray Taylor and Mr Coffey whom I consider good friends, not just people I had to work with. I wish Mick Reed all the best in his new position.

**Mr WOOD (Nelson):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I have spoken on this issue before, but I felt, with the current debate on the abortion drug, I would like to comment on some matters relating to abortion. A number of things I have read in the press and heard on the radio and in this parliament prompted me to put pen to paper on this issue tonight. I realise abortion is an emotive issue, but I have said before I am not making any judgments about anybody when I speak.

When I last spoke on the issue, I emphasised that I hoped that the government would at least try to look at reducing the number of abortions. No matter what side of the debate you are on, I find it difficult to believe that people would not support a policy which was proactive by offering women who wish to have an abortion compassionate options as an alternative to abortion.

I was listening to some of the debate in federal parliament yesterday and there was some very sincere debate on both sides. However, I was impressed by the minister, Tony Abbott, who bemoaned that Australia had up to 100 000 abortions this year. I think he said it was accepted as a fact of life, almost by some as a badge of liberation from old oppressions. I agree with him. When I see 1000 abortions per year in the Northern Territory, we seem to be mirroring what is happening throughout the rest of Australia.

What also prompted me to say something tonight is not just based on my support for the preservation of an unborn human life, but from an economic viewpoint that the Chief Minister raised in answer to a question about the upcoming Census yesterday. The Chief Minister said that it is important to count every Territorian because they are worth \$8500 of funding from Canberra. So when we have 1000 abortions or more a year, we are not only slowing our population growth, we are losing \$8.5m. That is a substantial loss to the Territory but no one seems to care. Why could we not use some of that money to assist mothers directly, or fund programs to help people when they are considering abortion?

Lastly, I would like to say that I found some aspects of the recent debate depressing. Senator Nettle's offensive T-shirt was part of the reason for that depression. When you read many of the comments in last weekend's *Weekend Australian* by some of the so-called enlightened commentators, similar to the Senator, saying that if you are a man, a Catholic and you are a supporter of preserving unborn human life, then you should be ridiculed and silenced, I was depressed because I believe there is nothing wrong with a man speaking on this issue.

All human life is born out of a male and female relationship. There is nothing wrong in being a Catholic, unless religious bigotry is now permitted. It is hard to believe that, in Australia, one can be criticised and ridiculed for simply supporting the most vulnerable of human life, the unborn. Unfortunately, that seems to be what is happening today.

It seems that the contemporary thinkers speak up against sexism and intolerance, and also support conservation, but only selectively. I know I am probably in a minority when I speak on this issue, but that will not persuade me from speaking out in the hope that there may be some others in this House who will at least speak up and support the unborn. I feel that to change the views of this government to even consider reducing the number of abortions is probably an impossible task, but I will keep trying and, as my mother would say, keep praying.

On a different matter altogether, but one that is close to my heart, I would like to talk about a book that was presented to me yesterday. During the Christmas holidays - in January, to be more specific - I went to Nitmiluk National Park. I took the day off and went for a walk on the escarpment. I had not been in Katherine Gorge or Nitmiluk for 20 years. It was very hot weather. It was before the monsoons came. I put on walking boots and dressed appropriately – or, as I thought appropriately, so that I would not get sunburnt – and packed a lot of water in my backpack and headed off across the escarpment.

Even though it was very hot and very exhausting, the escarpment was just beautiful. There was so much in flower. There were plants that I had not seen before, even though I had spent a lot of time at Daly River, and it was most enjoyable. I took many photographs, and there are quite a few plants I still have not been able to identify. When I returned to the information desk, I asked the lady if there were any lists of the flora of the national park, and all she could give me was a list of the fauna, the birds, so that was not much help.

Yesterday, I had to go to a briefing at the Herbarium about the albino python, which I hope to talk about later, but not tonight, and I mentioned that I had problems identifying some of the plants out there. Glenn Wightman, whom I know, poked his head around the corner and gave me this wonderful book, *Jawoyn plants and animals*. This book is really just tops. I have John Brock's book on Northern Territory plants, but this is just a great publication. I will read who put it together so we know where it has come from. It was put together by the Jawoyn elders, the ethnobiology project of NRETA, the Jawoyn Association, the Parks and Wildlife Service, the Diwurruwurru-Jaru Aboriginal Corporation and the Australian National University, and it is part of an ethnobiology project. It only came out late last year, 2005. It has taken at least 10 years for this book to come to fruition. I will find the date for you because it will give you some idea how much work was involved - 1989 to 2004.

What is so wonderful about this book is that it is easy to read; it is in a spiral backed version; and deals with a whole range of issues. It talks about who the Jawoyn are, the climate, the area; and the Jawoyn seasons, which I presume are fairly similar to the seasons promoted in Kakadu National Park - it is not just the Wet and the Dry, but everything in between. It talks about the history of Jawoyn country; the language and how to pronounce some of the Jawoyn words; and it shows the methods of how they collected all this information. It tells you the Jawoyn words for 'leaf', or 'branch' and that sort of thing.

It has a beautiful section on Jawoyn plant names and uses. It uses the scientific name, the common English name, and the Jawoyn name. For instance, *Abrus precatorius* is called the jungle beads and in Jawoyn that is *Kirringkirring*. They make necklaces from these seeds and there is a great picture which explains what they did. That goes on for page after page. There are some beautiful photographs in here. I reckon it is one of the best books I have seen. By the way, I know you cannot show it in *Hansard*, but my favourite plant in the Northern Territory is in the book. It is called *xanthostemon paradoxus*, which is this yellow flower. It is one of the crummiest looking trees you would see; it grows in very rocky country. It is one of the most beautiful flowers you will see in the bush. It is a magnificent plant and I have some growing on my property at Howard Springs.

Jawoyn animal names and uses are listed; a list of all the birds together with the biological names for the birds, and fish; it is extremely detailed. It has turtles, marsupials; and plenty of goannas. Hopefully, we still have them after the cane toads have been there. It also covers insects so you have things like the paper wasps; it gives a lovely description and calls them the *mulnut* and tells you that these smaller wasps have a very sharp, painful sting and if the nests are bumped they swarm after you. I can guarantee that is absolutely true having been stung by them quite a number of times. Green ants get a mention.

**Ms Scrymgour:** Good work by Parks and Wildlife.

**Mr WOOD:** This is an excellent book.

It includes crustaceans and molluscs so you have freshwater prawns. You have spiders. It also mentions pigs – I used to call it Pidgin English, they now call it Kriol – pig in Jawoyn is *pikipiki*, and horse is *mento* or *lento*; donkey is *tongki*; mule, they do not have a name for that; and *puluki*, well I always knew it was *puluki* and it is here.

It is just a great book. I must admit I was given this and I do not know what it would cost ...

**Mr Warren:** Member for Nelson, what is the name of the book?

**Mr WOOD:** The book is called *Jawoyn plants and animals; Aboriginal flora and fauna knowledge from Nitmiluk National Park and the Katherine area, northern Australia*. I ask the minister if she could find out if it is going to be available for sale at the Nitmiluk Information Centre as it was not there.

**Ms Scrymgour:** It will be; they are in production. More are being printed.

**Mr WOOD:** They are in production? If people are looking for a souvenir of their trip to Nitmiluk, this is it. I wish I had this when I went walking ...

**Ms Scrymgour:** There is a Tiwi book as well.

**Mr WOOD:** Yes, that is right. It is a great book to take with you if you are walking and you want to identify plants as it is in a format you do not have to struggle with.

I congratulate the Jawoyn people and Parks and Wildlife, and all the people associated with it. This reflects how the Jawoyn people who have put this together regard this as being a very important document. They say here:

*It is customary amongst the Jawoyn and other Aboriginal groups that the name of a deceased person is not spoken or written down for some time and images not displayed. However, the families of the deceased authors have decided that the full names and a photograph be included to acknowledge their important roles in this publication.*

That to me signifies that the Jawoyn people recognise the importance of this document.

I recommend it to anyone who loves plants especially, who would like to increase their knowledge about many of the local plants and their uses, and animals like the snakes, the bats and the turtles. It does not have a picture of the minister. I do not know what happened there. Why aren't you in here, minister?

**Ms Scrymgour:** The minister did not do it. The department did it.

**Mr WOOD:** A very modest minister. I am glad to see that.

**Ms Scrymgour:** The department and Jawoyn.

**Mr WOOD:** I congratulate your department and the Jawoyn people on the work that has gone on here. It is a ...

**Ms Scrymgour:** I did launch it at the last board meeting.

**Mr WOOD:** Forgot to ask me again.

**Mr Acting Deputy SPEAKER:** Are you planning, member for Nelson, to table that book?

**Mr WOOD:** No, definitely not going to table it. You can get your own. I will hang on to this with

my life. I just say to anyone get hold of this. The minister might be able to let people know where they can get them and how much they will cost. This one is well worth advertising and I thank the Acting Deputy Speaker for letting me give it a plug.

**Mr HENDERSON (Wanguri):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, this evening I express my appreciation for the dedicated hard work of Carol Skultety who is retiring from the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services after 25 years with the executive and policy areas of the Northern Territory government. Carol is a rock of support for both the tri-service and my ministerial office.

When Carol first moved to Darwin in 1980 she attended the Darwin Community College where she learnt the valuable skills of shorthand and typing before beginning her career in the Northern Territory Public Service that October. Her career has certainly been broad-ranging.

In the 1980s, Carol first worked with the Department of the Chief Minister and was involved with the Jabiru Town Development Authority. She moved on to work with the Administrator of the day, the late Commodore Eric Johnston, whom she recalls as having 'a wicked sense of humour', and where she remembers a visit by the Governor-General of the day.

In 1982, she moved back to the Department of the Chief Minister where she worked as a personal secretary, giving her experience in her current specialist field of reporting to chief executive officers and government ministers on ministerials, Cabinet submissions and on major railways including the Alice Springs to Darwin. She continued working in this field for the Office of Local Government, and the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries including organising a national agricultural conference.

After eight years with the Department of Primary Industry and Fisheries, Carol moved to the NT Employment and Training Authority where her wide-ranging duties included establishing a registry system, developing equal opportunity and occupational health and safety policies, and involvement in strategic and business planning.

Carol also had a stint with the NT Correctional Services before joining Police, Fire and Emergency Services in their Secretariat Division on 28 April 1997. Carol was promoted to Director Secretariat on 3 February 2003 - a well deserved appointment - and has worked as the NT Liaison Officer for the Australian *Police Journal*. As anyone who has worked in a government ministerial office or a department can attest, the role of Director of Secretariat is something of a jack of all trades: a diplomat, an organiser, an

information peddler, and a tactician. During her time with the NTPFES, Carol has progressed new and amended legislation, provided briefings for four budgets, delivered replies to ministerials, progress reports on election commitments and Cabinet decisions, and responded to urgent requests for assistance, all with a minimum of fuss.

I have had the privilege of working with Carol since being appointed Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services in 2002. Carol has provided excellent briefings to me in all forms but, in particular, for the Australian Police Ministers Conference and the Inter-government Committee of the Australian Crime Commission.

Carol will be farewelled from the Northern Territory Police, Fire and Emergency Services and the NT Public Sector tomorrow. I am very disappointed that I will not be able to get to that farewell due to Cabinet and a requirement to travel to Alice Springs. I sincerely thank you, Carol, for your years of commitment and dedicated service, as do all members of this House. I wish Carol a relaxing and rewarding retirement with her husband, Steven, and her children, Melanie, Heath, Darius and Vanessa. Carol, you will be very sorely missed and have a great retirement.

It seems hard to believe that it is already 16 February; the year is flying by. I would like to take this opportunity to reflect on a very busy and eventful end of 2005 in my electorate. The Christmas spirit was certainly on display in Leanyer and Wanguri with homes, schools and businesses lit up for the festive season. Holy Spirit Primary School was a standout with the school coming to life every night with the nativity scene and Christmas lights setting in the heart of Wanguri. Congratulations to Gill and all of the staff and students at Holy Spirit. It was great to see the school lit up.

I would also like to make a special mention of my nearby neighbours in Haritos Street, Franco and Jenny Zuccarato, who always go to great lengths to decorate their house in Christmas cheer. The local community really enjoys their efforts, and they again were a well-deserved feature in the Power and Water 'Show Santa Where you Live' competition. Franco and Jenny won the competition this year. I forget how many thousands of light bulbs they had up. They bring a huge amount of joy to many hundreds - probably thousands - of people who drive by their house in Haritos Street, and great joy to the kids. Franco gets out probably about three weeks before Christmas. Every evening he is there putting up the lights. My eldest son, Alasdair, was an apprentice on the job this year and did a great job. To Franco and Jenny, thank you for bringing great joy to so many people who live in Darwin.

The Christmas cheer is also spreading in Hotham Court in Leanyer, with just about the whole street fitting out their houses and front yards with Christmas decorations and light displays. It is just amazing to drive down Hotham Court. There is a real competition going on there in Leanyer. Many hundreds and probably thousands of people travelled up and down Hotham Court to see the lights.

It is great to see neighbours working together to boost Christmas cheer for the community. Well done to all residents who contributed to the positive vibe around the electorate in the lead-up to Christmas.

The lead-up to Christmas is one of the best times of the year in the electorate, particularly in the six schools as they see out the year with Christmas concerts, graduations and award nights. So much work goes into each performance at the school concerts, and the kids really celebrate the meaning of Christmas.

At the end of every year, our schools farewell students as they begin new chapters in their lives. Year 12 student Yvonne Chau, a Wanguri resident, was the top student in Year 12, the award winner this year. She received an early Christmas present with an end-of-year score of 99% - a huge achievement for Yvonne and very well deserved for all the hard work that she has put in. Yvonne was studying at Casuarina Senior College, and her hard work paid off as she achieved a perfect score of 20 for English Studies, Physics, Maths and Chemistry, and 19 in Indonesian. Yvonne, congratulations on a wonderful achievement. I wish you all the best as you relocate interstate to pursue studies in medicine. I hope once you graduate with your degree, Yvonne, you will return to the Northern Territory.

It was great to attend the Dripstone High School Year 12 graduation awards night, recognising students for their hard work during the year. I would like to make special mention of the following award winners: Dripstone High Year 12 student, Ben Anderson, received my encouragement award, Kylie Wells received the Caltex Best All Rounder Award, and Kate Sawyer was named Dux of the Year - congratulations, Kate. It was great to be there that evening with my colleague, the member for Casuarina.

Year 7 students were also honoured as they celebrated the end of the primary school years. Leanyer Primary School student, Rhiannon Oakhill, well deserved my Year 7 Academic Award; best wishes, Rhiannon, next year at high school. Wanguri Primary School Year 7 student Erin Tunney was the winner of Wanguri's Citizenship Award; congratulations, Erin. Heath

Hudson received the Holy Spirit Year 7 Achievement Award; well done, Heath.

Congratulations to all Year 12 and Year 7 students. I wish you all the best as you start your next journey. I wish all students, parents and teachers best wishes for the start of the 2006 school year, and have enjoyed already getting along to the schools this term to welcome everyone back.

Last December, as my colleague, the member for Casuarina said, Tracy Village Sports and Social Club celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> birthday with a week of events, including the cutting of the birthday cake. I could not be there but I was there earlier in the evening and my colleague was there for the cutting of the cake. Tracy Village is coming along in leaps and bounds. I cannot wait for all of their improvements to come to light this year. Congratulations to Gary, John and all the crew at Tracy Village.

I was pleased to hold my electorate Christmas party at Tracy Village on 8 December. It was a great night to catch up with neighbours and community members and all the people who have supported me particularly over the last four years. Many members turned up as well, so thanks for coming along. It was a fabulous evening.

I had the privilege of attending the Leanyer Seniors Village Christmas party. Over the years, that has become a really strong knit community at Leanyer, including a social committee. I enjoyed catching up with the residents before Christmas for a party. Well done to chair, John Smith, and all the residents for continuing to put on such great events and really forming a great community at Leanyer.

We are only a couple of weeks into the first term of the new school year, and I have already started visiting the local schools again.

One great government initiative that is really receiving support at schools in my electorate is the \$50 Back to School Payment Scheme. Parents have told me it is a welcome hand in the cost of books and uniforms. I do not know who is orchestrating those letters to the *Northern Territory News* about the back to school vouchers but, again, a firm grasp of the wrong end of the stick. They are very popular and have been very well received.

I recently met with developers of the Lyons development on Lee Point Road. I have developed a great relationship with development director, Geoff Smith. Congratulations, Geoff, and all the team there for that development. It is going to be a really exciting year, and we cannot wait for the development to get under way. The new

suburb is generating a lot of interest, and I for one look forward to seeing work starting.

Residents will see a lot of movement on the site once the Wet Season ends, with the first houses of Stage 1 expected to be complete by August this year. The development corporation has also launched a new web site so local residents can keep up-to-date with the project.

There was a colourful event last weekend when the Chung Wah Lion troupe blessed my electorate office in Hibiscus to welcome in the Chinese New Year. It is fabulous having the lion come by every year. Congratulations to Chung Wah. It is just a great tradition around Darwin. My kids have grown up with seeing the Chinese lions, and following them through the streets of Darwin every year. It is a wonderful part of our heritage, and it really is fabulous to see the joy that Chung Wah bring to the kids with the lions every year. Most of the shops at Hibiscus were also blessed, and I hope the Year of the Dog brings the centre another blockbuster year in 2006, as the year 2005 was a very busy year.

**Mr MILLS (Blain):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, firstly, I thank the member for Nelson for his contribution this evening on the very difficult issue of abortion. As another member of this House, I support the comments that the member for Nelson registered here tonight. I hope that there is further discussion on this most important of issues.

I now move to cane toads. It has been very interesting, the front page of the *Northern Territory News* in contrast with the *Palmerston Sun* and *Darwin Sun*. That has already been mentioned in a previous contribution, I think by the member for Nelson, last night – the issues of super toads: the media just loves to get a handle on, somehow or other, the issue of cane toads. I know people are interested in them, so if they can find a story and reflect it on the front page, people will buy their paper.

I am not a scientist, however, I have always taken an active interest in nature. I would pose a question over the proposition that there are such things as 'super' toads. For this reason – we have all heard stories that, in Queensland, the toads have found their natural balance and they are dying out and they are smaller in number. Therefore, if we permit them to occupy every last corner of the space they wish to, they will eventually find their own natural balance, become smaller in number, and we will be able to live with them. That is an attractive idea that has been promoted for some time. It is, however, in my view, and supported by those far more learned than I in this matter, completely false.

Katherine residents will report, yes, that phenomena is correct. They arrived in Katherine, they were huge, they were energetic, and they invaded the place in one fell swoop. They were everywhere. Now, a year later, they are fewer in number.

Is that because they have found their natural balance in Katherine? No, it is not. Sadly, it is that they have eaten everything. Once they have consumed all that they can, there is none left to sustain the population, and so they reach critical mass and collapse. That is why they are smaller and less frequent in Queensland, because they have eaten all that they can eat, and they find that natural balance. Sadly, in that natural balance which is in the toads' favour, there are now no more lizards, insects, and aquatic life which were once there in abundance and a part of the original balance. So the issue of the 'super' toad is, in my view, just the virulent nature of a predator moving into a zone where there is an abundance of food, and once they have consumed it they then shrink back a little in size and in number.

The word 'evolution' has been very misused; evolution is the underlying scientific proposition that one creature changes into another creature such as a dog will become another animal, or an amoeba will become another completely different organism. When they use the word evolution, that these animals have evolved, they have adapted, that is a different proposition altogether. They have not evolved; they have adapted and they will shrink back in size once they consumed all there is to be consumed. Sadly, some of those wonderful animals that have been highlighted in the book the member for Nelson brought to our attention in this House will no longer be registered there once these cane toads have established their position in ecosystem.

I move now to an issue - or a series of three under one heading. Many members who think about how things work in our society would probably be familiar with the idea of the 'broken window'; that if we want to maintain a heightened and respect for law and order in our jurisdiction we attend to the small things, such as the broken window. If you fix the broken window in the school and make sure that immediately all vandalism is repaired you demonstrate to that community that values are going to be reinforced and are, indeed, valued. There is great power in the small things. And so, on that idea, I would like to run that theme through three different areas. If we are going to make a major difference in the profile and the presentation of the Northern Territory we need also to attend strategically to the small things.

I made reference earlier in the week to a monument that had been defaced. If we want to promote the Territory so that those who see it will

go away with a very positive and strong impression and a long-lasting memory and tell others about it, it is the small things that will really make the difference.

Sadly, I am not one who had met Noel Buntine but I have met members of his family. As one who has had, in my own family, an association with a transport industry, the issue of Noel Buntine's monument is one that has struck a strong chord with me. One, because of the stories behind that - the hardship, the pioneering aspect of developing the Territory through transport and the support of the pastoral industry - but also because it illustrates the principle: look out for the small things and it becomes easier to establish a respect for the broader principles.

In referring to Noel Buntine I make reference to another book, *Australia's Road Transport Heritage*. It has been put together by Liz Martin - some of you may have met Liz Martin - in association with the Road Transport Hall of Fame. For members who have not yet been to the Transport Hall of Fame, I urge you to attend. I was not sure what I would find there but I took my mother and father to the Transport Hall of Fame. It was one of those magic moments that I shared with my mum and dad when they saw all these old trucks, utilities, that all had stories attached to them and unlocked all sorts of memories, just as the monument dedicated to Noel Buntine. I will read a small section from this book:

*Noel Buntine Modern Day Trucking Legend. There is no name in the world of heavy cattle haulage in Australia that is likely to stir up as much emotion as that of Noel Buntine. His name is synonymous with hard work, dedication, and determination to get the job done. His big, green and white cattle road trains were a part of everyday life for many outback Australians and were renowned for getting through no matter what the hurdles the tough Australian bush would throw at them.*

The name speaks strongly. I have heard the name ever since I came here. He passed away, sadly, in 1994 and, to the strong memory of Noel Buntine, a memorial was established. It was with some emotion a man who knew him and all he represents presented some photographs to me. As I said on Tuesday, I will present these photographs to this Chamber to be brought to the attention of the Chief Minister. I call upon the Chief Minister to do whatever is necessary to address this sad issue, which will go a long way to help raise the standard and appreciation for the things that the Chief Minister is endeavouring to do, which I support, of strengthening the tourism industry. Things like this would certainly help to strengthen that principle.

I seek leave to table these photographs.

Leave granted.

**Mr MILLS:** The next one is a small matter again for the interests of debate in here. We talk about large things and I have been occupied, as have my colleagues opposite, on broad issues to do with the economy, nett debt and concepts that would not be the topic of many conversations around the dinner table throughout my electorate. Nonetheless, they are important issues and we need to talk about the economy and how we are achieving the objectives which we need to achieve on behalf of our constituents.

Today, I received a letter, the issue of which has been referred to in this Chamber, and probably will be referred to again. That issue has been brought to our attention by Mark Salter.

Mark, I will make reference to you in this contribution in parliament to draw attention to the principle that the smaller issues help us to address the broader issues; that being to achieve our objectives and make sure that we are attending to the real issues in achieving better health outcomes for Territorians. This is a challenge, but it is an instructive challenge and, I am sure, will help the minister who is responsible to be able to assist in improving outcomes for Territorians.

Mark, I sincerely hope your health has improved. You have been through a difficult time, but you reflect concerns which many in our community experience from time to time, and it is beholden on all of us to respond to these so we can find ways of improving this. In doing so, I acknowledge the nearly 14 000 people in Palmerston and rural area who have clearly stated to this government the need for a 24-hour accident and emergency facility in Palmerston to service the broader community around Palmerston and the rural area.

There is still no emergency medical facility in Palmerston and that is the first issue which Mr Salter raises. It took him nearly 17 hours to seek alleviation for a very distressing problem, and he goes through his story - I will table the letter for the information of members and anyone else who is particularly interested. It is instructive to us as members of this Chamber to look at these stories as it helps us to focus on ensuring that we do achieve the real objectives. It took 17 hours for an issue which he tried to resolve himself; knew that he was not able to do so in Palmerston; went to Accident and Emergency at the Royal Darwin Hospital. Time ticked away: half-an-hour, another half-an-hour, then another half-an-hour, and still no resolution.

It was suggested after many hours of having a blockage in his throat where he was unable to swallow, that he should drink some Coke. The saddest part in this is where he was told that and then he was told again about half-an-hour later that he really needed to go to the other room and buy himself a can of Coke. He bought the can of Coke, drank it but it did not provide any relief to the blockage in his throat. He had been unable to swallow for many hours. For anyone who has had children who have suffered a block, it is very distressing. There is the real potential of choking. It was 17 hours before that was relieved.

It is a story which came to my attention this morning. Mark is in my electorate and my thoughts go out to him tonight. It has been brought to the attention of members of the broader Assembly, and I trust that his experience will assist us in improving outcomes in health.

Finally, I make reference to a group of people who live in Cobham Court, in the suburb of Moulden. Members may be aware that a couple of weeks ago there was a very savage and violent assault in that street which has caused immense distress to a number of the residents. One lady, to my knowledge, has moved out of the street because of what she witnessed in that street. It is very informative to me to be aware of the sort of trauma that does visit our streets from time to time. I thank the Palmerston police and the housing office for the assistance they have provided. I recognise the stress that many of those people have gone through. I do not want to go into any further detail at this point, because I hope that the issue will be resolved. At the moment, it is ongoing and sustained, but it appears that help is at hand.

However, an interesting point came out of it. When we looked at the cause of the problem, which is just so distressing ...

**Mr Acting Deputy SPEAKER:** Your time has expired, member for Blain.

**Dr Lim:** I thought it was one more minute before the light comes on.

**Mr Acting Deputy SPEAKER:** No, it just finished then.

**Mr MILLS:** Did it? To be continued. I was just getting to the point.

**Ms ANDERSON (Macdonnell):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, tonight the focus of my speech is on achievements of teachers and students.

I have found that one of the joys of this job is the opportunity to meet teachers and students from schools throughout Central Australia. Late

last year, I had the honour of attending the speech night at Centralian College in Alice Springs. This was a real showcase of the hard work of Centralian College students throughout the year.

The senior students did a fine job MC'ing the speech night, and it is a credit to the Centralian College and, particularly Tony Collins, the Deputy Principal, who was in charge of organising the event, that the night really was a celebration of students' achievements.

The capacity of the students was on display, and I congratulate all of them for their hard work during the year. There are too many student award winners to name individually, but I would like to single out:

- Cherisse Buzzacott, the winner of the Chief Minister's Award. Cherisse is a very talented young indigenous woman who lives in the seat of Macdonnell. Her dedication to her schooling has paid dividends, and I am confident that she has a bright future in front of her.
- Anthony Campbell received the Outstanding Effort by a Stage 2 Indigenous Student Award; and
- Jessica Procak, Daniel Measures; and Terri Unger received Outstanding Effort by a Stage 1 Indigenous Student Awards.

I was delighted to see these young indigenous students achieving excellent results in senior secondary school, and it made me feel optimistic about the Northern Territory's future. Our young people have great capacity and, whether they are award winners or not, the most important thing is to get the best education they can, and then live their dreams.

I acknowledge the teachers and staff of Centralian College who are clearly doing an excellent job of educating and nurturing the future generation of Territorians. Our education system depends largely on the professionalism and dedication of our teachers. They are one of the Territory's most important assets and play a crucial role in ensuring that every Territory student receives a top quality education. We must value them and give them the resources they need to fully develop the potential of our young people in the Northern Territory.

It was for this reason that I was pleased to be asked to speak to the newly-recruited teachers at the orientation in Alice Springs during January. The effort to recruit teachers in Central Australia has been outstanding, and for this I pay tribute to Ms Rita Henry, the Executive Director of DEET

Central Australia, and Jo Huyben, the recruitment officer, who have put in real hard work and dedication to achieve this great result.

The teacher recruits I met were full of enthusiasm. I am hopeful that the policies that have been developed in the government's Building Better Schools policy will ensure that they stay in the Territory and help us to ensure that every student has the opportunity to be the best they can.

**Dr LIM (Greatorax):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, tonight I will speak about some health issues. Obviously, this is something that has been going on for some time. Each day we hear more complaints from people that they are not getting adequately serviced.

We heard tonight from the member from Blain whose constituent wrote to him, and also the Minister for Health, about an incident that was potentially life-threatening. There are complaints from people who say that they have to travel interstate for oncology treatment, for radiotherapy treatment – this government has promised us that they are going to provide us with the facilities and they are not there. There are patients who go to emergency departments and end up spending two to three days in the emergency department on trolleys on one-inch thick mattresses, to then get treated in the corridors of the emergency department. Then, after two days, they get discharged from the emergency department without the patient ever entering a ward, despite the fact they had to have intravenous therapy, intravenous medication and the like.

It is not something that I bring up lightly. I believe our professional staff do their very utmost – their very utmost - to ensure that patients get the best care they possibly can within the resources they have to work with. However, the problem is the resources are not adequate, absolutely not adequate. The Australian Nurses Federation Northern Territory Branch has complained over and over again that there are not enough facilities, and time and time again, the government says: 'Everything is fine. It is hunky-dory. We have recruited 100 nurses for you. What are you whingeing about?'

What the minister is not saying is how many nurses have left the service because of the poor working conditions, albeit you have recently raised the salary scale by some 5% or 5.3% which brings it into parity with some of the other states. If the working conditions are still poor, parity in salaries is not going to be attractive enough to bring them to the Northern Territory.

It was only on Monday, when the Northern Territory Branch Secretary of the Australian

Nurses Federation was in Alice Springs, and she was asked by the media: 'Can you describe for us the conditions at the Alice Springs Hospital as you observed earlier today?' What she said was:

*When I went in there I found a department that was extremely crowded with no room to move, nowhere for more patients to come in, every available space had a patient on a trolley. There were patients on trolleys down corridors. In an area called the plaster room, there were four patients on beds, on trolley beds, in a treatment room. So, it was pretty much chockers as far as where patients could go next.*

Then they asked a question about what it was like compared to other regions. Is Alice Springs just an isolated case or is it the same? She replied:

*The problem with Alice Springs is that there's nowhere to go for them. Once their beds in the hospital are full and once their emergency department is full and they've already got these extra patients waiting for beds, there is nowhere for them to go. There are no expandable walls where they can be sent over to another hospital or a private hospital. They have to contain and cope with it within their own facility. And that is a big problem for them.*

When you have facilities that are bursting at the seams, when you have staff who are overworked, you are going to produce a situation where, potentially, some mistake will occur. The Secretary of the Northern Territory Branch of the Australian Nurses Federation said this:

*Well, I have concerns for a combination of the staff and the patients. The patients because they are on trolleys and they have – they are amongst other people, where they - if they need to access the toilet, they are pretty much in the view of other people, that there are no oxygen suction in the corridors where they are parked on trolleys. There is no patient alarm bell. Yeah, so there are quite a lot of concerns there. The nursing staff – there are only a small number of nursing staff that are permanent in that area.*

It goes on. Then she says:

*Well the staff are telling me that across the hospital there are between 50 and 60 nurses short.*

And they ANF should know:

*Now, they have just received - were allowed to go and obtain 10 nurses from an agency but that just barely scratches the surface when you are down that many nurses.*

They are 50 to 60 nurses short, and the hospital, the government, allowed them to recruit 10 agency nurses. These are nurses who are working long shifts, some of them double shifts, and I recall a case who worked for 28 hours. This is just ridiculous - absolutely ridiculous. You cannot afford to do that to any health professional.

When you complain, the minister says: 'You are wrong, you are just talking down the hospital'. I am not talking down the hospital. I am saying to the government: 'For goodness sake, help Alice Springs. Help them get a better health system, you just cannot keep going the way you have been doing'.

Let us go back from the patient's prospective. I had one patient, an elderly lady, who went to the emergency department one Sunday night and she was placed on an emergency trolley - an old one at that; they must have brought it up from the basement. It had a one-inch thick mattress. The doctors had decided that this elderly lady had pneumonia and needed to be admitted to the hospital but there were no beds that night. She had to stay on the trolley for the night. Next morning, the same story: 'There are no beds, you stay there'. That first night she was there, she was nursed on the trolley in a cubicle. The next day, because there was still no bed, she was pushed from the cubicle into the corridor where she still stayed on that trolley. Later that day, she went from the corridor to a holding room; still no bed in the ward, still on the same trolley. The first night in emergency in a cubicle, the second day in the corridor, and later that second day she went to a holding room. The third day she was still in a holding room, by which time she had had two days of intravenous injections of antibiotics for pneumonia and doctors thought she would be better at home rather than staying in the holding room. She was discharged from the emergency department to go home and they continued her treatment.

That is under-resourcing of the hospital to cater for the health care of people in Alice Springs. The government must do something about that. My patients complained: 'I cannot wait any longer for my knee operation. I had to have a knee operation. They told me I cannot get it in Alice Springs. I cannot get it done for months and months so I have decided I will fly out at my own cost to an orthopaedic surgeon in Adelaide to a private hospital to get it done. Thank goodness, I have private insurance and I could at least offset some of the costs through private insurance'.

A son of an elderly lady who lives at the Old Timers in Alice Springs came to see me. He said: 'Doc, I am really angry. I am fed up. My mum has had a hip problem and until the hip problem became troublesome she was able to live on her own in a nursing home, at the Old Timers Home. She has seen a doctor, the orthopaedic surgeon, 12 months ago and he told her that she needed a total hip replacement. She has been waiting ever since then'. Two weeks ago, he said: 'Mum had to go into respite care because she could not look after herself anymore at home, her hip was just so painful and incapacitating'.

When the man came to see me he came because he found out that his mother had one week left in respite care and after that she had to get out of respite care into her own independent living cottage. He said: 'Mum cannot live on her own and she cannot get any surgery'. I asked if he had been back to see the surgeon. He said: 'Yes, we did. We went to see the surgeon at the hospital and he told me and mum that she cannot have any surgery done in Alice Springs because it is not available. We cannot do it for her. We have no room, no beds, no space', and, in fact, she could not get the hip operation done anywhere in the Northern Territory for the next six months.

What is this woman going to do? I asked the minister at least make sure that this woman is sent down to Adelaide to get treatment. When I get back from sittings I will be contacting the family to see what has happened with this lady. Our staff are crying out for help from this government. People in Alice Springs are saying services have been deteriorating. The minister says: 'We have 100 nurses for you, we have put over \$200m more into the health budget, the Alice Springs Hospital is getting more from the health budget'. Minister, what has happened to the money? Where has it gone? Surely when you spend 50% more money in the health budget than you did four years ago you would expect services to improve. Instead, waiting lists have grown longer.

In Alice Springs, at the change of government five years ago, there were 450 patients on the waiting lists. Last Christmas, it was up to 1600. In Darwin, we are now up to 1700 patients on the waiting lists when three years previously it was something like 1450. So, there is an inherent problem in the department. The minister said we have recruited 100 nurses for the Health Department. At the same time, he has recruited 100 administrative officers. All I can say is that on paper it appears as if for every nurse that the minister has recruited he has recruited an administrative officer to follow around with a pen and pad. That is a tragic set of circumstances when you cannot provide health care adequately for people living in Central Australia where they have only one hospital, and there is nowhere else

they can go without travelling 1000 km in any direction to get help. You have to make sure that the services you provide are adequate for the people who live there.

You have the ability to do it. You have to spend time thinking about how you are going to do it. Perhaps, you have to reconsider the style of management that you have within your department.

**Mr BURKE (Brennan):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I was privileged to attend the Chung Wah Society Chinese New Year Dinner on 5 February 2006. It was a fantastic evening organised by the society. I congratulate them for not just the wonderful entertainment and the setting up of the room in which the event was held, but also the chamber leading into the room which was decorated like a Chinese garden, from memory.

What struck me about the evening as well was that, as you would expect, there were fair representations from the Chinese community, but there were also many people who were not of Chinese background. That reflects very well on the Territory and it reflects the Territory's multiculturalism. It seems to me that Chinese New Year is so much a part of the culture of the Territory, particularly Darwin and Palmerston I guess, which is where my experience is, that it is a mainstream event.

I congratulate Donna Quong, the compere for the evening; a very accomplished compere she is too, getting lots of help from her fiancé, Phil, at times when she needed it; as she did when she was serenaded by the Administrator, Mr Ted Egan. He had some wonderful words to say about Donna. I do not think she would mind me saying that she was quite moved by His Honour's celebration of her talents, I suppose you would call it. I have to say to Donna that, despite what the Administrator said, and despite my request, she has not lined me up with an appointment for the Pope, as the Administrator said she could. I will keep chasing Donna up for that one.

The night was also a great chance to find out some things I did not know about some of my colleagues. I did not know that the member for Greatorex was a Fire Dog. They had a few games specifically for Fire Dogs because we have moved into the Fire Dog Year. I can say, from witnessing it with my own eyes, that the member for Greatorex certainly does know how to do his balloon tying! He was pretty close to winning the competition for turning an innocent sausage balloon into a very realistic dog. I congratulate him for that and for taking part. It was a good, fun affair and everyone really enjoyed it.

Staying with the Chinese New Year, on Saturday, 11 February, the member for Drysdale and I had our offices blessed by the Chinese lions. The Chinese lions are such a spectacular affair and get everyone involved. When the lions came to bless my office, being within the Palmerston Shopping Centre, quite a crowd was created. However, it was more for the lions than anything else because the lions went down and blessed a number of shops, which was also good to see. A great many of the shops within the shopping centre, not just those owned by Chinese people, participated. You could hear the drums accompanying the lions all the way down the main walkway. It was a fantastic day and we really enjoyed handing out red balloons to celebrate the Chinese New Year.

There was a particularly interesting, impromptu event where the member for Drysdale, with the assistance of some of the young kids in the area, attempted to rescue a balloon which had escaped someone's grasp. That was a lot of fun. It really turned into a family affair, with my wife and three children, and the member for Drysdale and his wife, Jetta, and his parents as well, who were here on holiday. I hope they have a good time while here.

I would like to welcome some teachers who have joined the staff at Moulden Park Primary School: Jutta Kulwilowski, Tammy Pace and Karla Gillett. Jutta and Tammy are Year 2/3 teachers and Karla is a Transition teacher. I welcome them to that school. I am not sure they are new to the Territory as well; however, I am sure they will enjoy their time there. To those who left Moulden Park, Gail Taylor, who went interstate, and Miranda Yokowo who joined Gray Primary School, where many children from my electorate go, I hope you enjoy whatever you have gone on to. Gail, moving interstate, I hope everything works well for you there. Miranda, I will certainly see a lot more of you at Gray Primary School when I visit.

I would also like to welcome back to Moulden Park Wendy Jordan, who did a stint with Student Services last year and has now returned to the school. I know that she is really looking forward to that, and having been there a couple of weeks now will probably feel like she never left.

I welcome Julian Denholm, the new Principal at Good Shepherd Primary School. Julian is obviously a person with a lot of energy and a real vision for where he wants to take the school in the future. I will certainly do my part, as I am sure the member for Drysdale will, to assist in any way we can with any queries he may have. That is an offer we extend to all our schools in our areas, particularly in the case of Gray, which is physically not in my electorate, but certainly, as I say, many of the children from my electorate attend there.

The same goes for Sacred Heart Primary School; many children from Brennan go there for their education. I wish them all the best. It is a great time at school, even though you do not realise it perhaps when you are going through it. All of the schools really do an excellent job.

I should make a special mention of Bakewell Primary School, and June Wessels, the Principal there, and the staff, Helen Armstrong, the librarian. I hope the year is going really well for you. I will be in attendance as often as I can, and will be helping out as often as I can when I do the odd stint on the children's crossing. I extend a request to anyone who may be reading this to help out at Bakewell Primary School on the school crossings; there are a number of crossings to the school and there are some very busy roads around there.

Late last year, I was privileged to attend the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday celebration performance of the Palmerston Ballet School. They did a wonderful rendition of *Cinderella*, with children, from the very young - I hesitate to guess the ages, but certainly 4, 5 and 6-year-olds right the way through to young adults in their later teenage years. There was a fantastic integration of hip hop and break dancing as well as the traditional ballet. I congratulate the ballet school on the achievement of 21 years of teaching young children and young adults some wonderful dance moves.

I recently attended the Palmerston High School to present a letter to one of their students who had won an Australia Day award. I took the time out while there to talk to the students a little about becoming involved in political discussion. I do not mean going out joining political parties and that sort of thing - certainly I would not discourage that - but taking an interest.

At the time, in the press, there was debate about whether it should be made illegal to burn an Australian flag as part of a protest. I believe this is an issue that our young people should not feel is for those older to make decisions on. As I said in my presentation, at the time when I was at school here in Darwin we did not sing the national anthem at the start of the day. There was not a flag out the front of the school but that is something that has evolved over time. Now you would be hard pressed to find a school which did not at least sing the national anthem and the school song at their assemblies. Pride in one's nation is important but I also think freedom of expression has a place as well and that is why this sort of debate is an important one in which to engage.

I would also like to make mention of the Moulden Park Primary School Art Exhibition. Some local artists devoted their time running some courses with the children. I was lucky enough to see the exhibition at the end of their work and it

was really fantastic. Some had put together kites, there were clay models, sculptures, and tie die work. It was really good. Children's imagination should be encouraged and artistic expression is a great way to do that.

During the election I said in the event I was successful I would have to seriously consider moving into the electorate. I am pleased to announce that my family and I have done just that.

**A member:** Hear, hear!

**Mr BURKE:** Thank you. We have moved into the suburb of Farrar, and it is a lovely place to be in, we are enjoying it very much. I am sure I will be seeing those of my neighbours whom I have not already caught up with and sharing a few ales and barbecues in the days and years to come.

I would also like to just quickly mention the Australia Day Gala Ball that I attended with my wife, Sharon, and congratulate Heather Sjoberg and the committee on another wonderful event. It was well organised, well attended, and we had a great time there. We have much to celebrate in this nation and it is good to see that the day seems to get more and more important as the years go on, or perhaps it is just that I get older, I do not know.

**Dr BURNS (Johnson):** Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, at the end of last year, Mr Thomas Chin retired from the Darwin Bus Service. Tommy made an outstanding contribution to the service over 41 years having commenced with the Northern Territory Administration Bus Service on 21 July 1964. He commenced work as a garage assistant and then went to work in the Administration car pool before becoming a town bus driver. Tommy worked as a school bus driver doing school bus runs and lots of charter work. He was also a leading hand bus driver for a period of around four years, the duties of which are similar to the current supervisors. Tommy played a role in developing the public bus services for the Darwin community leading to the improvement in services over the year.

Tommy will long be remembered for his loyal and conscientious attitude earning the respect of both his colleagues and passengers. He has been a valued employee who was always willing to help out especially with special events and emergencies like Cyclone Tracy. Unfortunately, Tommy underwent major heart surgery a couple of years ago which influenced his decision to retire.

I take this opportunity to thank Tommy for his outstanding contribution in the provision of safe, courteous and professional services to the public of Darwin. I went to a function at the bus depot when Tommy retired along with others, many

well-wishers, his family, and old work colleagues; it was a great afternoon that we shared with Tom. There were many jokes about Tommy and some of the things he has done and about some of his mates, and it was a very moving occasion. So, with all his mates and everybody at Darwin Bus, I wish him all the best for a happy and healthy retirement.

Tonight, I would like to talk about Senior Constable Martin James. I was not at all surprised to hear that Senior Constable Martin James was awarded the Australian Police Medal on Australia Day. I have known Martin and his family, who live in my electorate, for over 15 years and our kids grew up together. We know the James family very well and they are very well-respected members of our community. Martin is a dedicated and enthusiastic member of the police force who has shown exemplary leadership, investigative and operational planning skills. He is highly regarded for his support and mentoring of junior officers, as well as the role he played while serving with the United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor.

Martin is a born and bred Territorian, one of 13 children. He was educated at St John's College, then Downlands in Toowoomba before returning to Darwin to work as a soil sampler with the Department of Works. In February 1971, he commenced work for the then Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Administration at Umbakumba on Groote Eylandt before transferring back to Darwin with relieving periods at Bamyili and Maningrida.

In 1974, Martin decided on a career change and applied for the Northern Territory Police Force commencing training on 23 September. Upon completion of training, he transferred to Katherine General Duties. His first hectic day was Christmas Day of that year when Cyclone Tracy went through Darwin, and Katherine Police Station was receiving a large volume of telephone traffic from south as well as HF radio contact with Darwin. The then Inspector Andy McNeill came into the station to give a hand and in the afternoon the police had to set up a road block to stop people going to Darwin as there were no facilities there. Cars were streaming in from Darwin and, not long after, Katherine locals arrived with eskies, ice, soft drinks, water, and beers, which they handed out to the evacuees. A permit system was introduced for people wanting to go to Darwin and the road blocks stayed in place for six months.

During the next three years, Martin relieved at Pine Creek, Wollogorang, Roper Bar, Maranboy and Hooker Creek. I was most interested to hear of his experience at Wollogorang, which is in the Gulf country between Borroloola and Burketown and it is probably the most isolated police station.

During the Wet he could travel two miles to the west and three miles to the east. There was no telephone and contact was HF radio only. Every morning he did a 'sched' with Katherine and then Darwin police, followed by a chat with surrounding stations and Redback mine where there was an exploration camp. In the afternoon, there was another 'sched' with Darwin and Katherine police. The policeman was also the local weather observer and these details had to be transmitted to Mt Isa on a regular basis.

Wollogorang cattle station homestead was only about a mile from the police station so a fair bit of time was spent there. Martin had two trackers and their families, so there was always someone to talk to. Every morning the trackers' wives would milk the goats and Martin would have a billy full of fresh milk every day. There was plenty of black bream in Settlement Creek just across the road from the police station, when it started running and, naturally, there was plenty of beef.

When Martin looks back at the facilities that the police had then which were probably not much better than the early 1900s, and compares them with now, he is amazed. All police in remote localities now have airconditioning in vehicles, houses and stations. All vehicles are fitted with modern winches compared to titor winches. Some have satellite phones with hands-free kits. The modern HF radio can be used while driving, compared to the old ones where one had to stop, get out of the vehicle, lift the bonnet, connect the radio to the battery, throw the aerial up a tree, tune it in and then call for help!

Martin met his wife, Lynette, who is a fantastic person, whilst he was stationed at Maranboy east of Katherine. He tells me that the phone at the police station was an old type that went through the Darwin Telephone Exchange and he got a bit fond of the voice at the other end. Eventually, he met Lyn and things progressed so well from there that they were married in April 1978, by which time Martin had transferred back to Darwin and was working in General Duties. The following year Martin and Lyn's oldest son, Ken, who is a good mate of my eldest son, David, arrived followed by Shaun in 1981, the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Martin's police career.

In 1981, Martin was transferred to the Stock Squad in the CIB. The investigations were many and varied. He was fortunate to have worked with some very good investigators. He also undertook training in arson investigation and found this to be another exciting aspect of police work. Martin stayed in the CIB until 2001, when he was transferred to the Gold Squad. This job also took him all over the Territory and he enjoyed the challenge of learning another chapter of police work. Unfortunately, the Gold Squad was closed

down. However, Martin had obtained his Coxswain Certificate and was able to join the Marine and Fisheries Unit. Once again, he enjoyed learning all about this new environment and all the places that had to be patrolled.

Martin was also fortunate to be seconded to the Australian Federal Police for a six-month stint in East Timor. He tells me that the facilities at the village of Atsabe in the Ermera District were virtually zero. There was no electricity except for a small generator at the police station and the only phone was at the police station, but it worked on the odd occasion. It took four hours to drive to Dili, but only 10 minutes by helicopter. The house he rented had no water to it so, when he returned to Darwin for a break after a month, he bought a 100 m of 1" polypipe and a few fittings, got back to East Timor, found a pipe that was gushing water, and connected water to the house as well as neighbouring locals' houses. He also set up a small library and appointed a local to be in charge. Every time Martin returned to Atsabe after days off in Darwin, he would take back soccer and volleyballs, and people of all ages would play these games. The people are particularly friendly, and Martin found it a pleasure to work in the area.

I congratulate Martin on his Australian Police Medal. I wish him many more enjoyable years with the police force in the Marine and Fisheries Unit. Martin's story, as it has unfolded here, attests to the great opportunities of the Territory, particularly in the police force. Martin has been all over the Territory, met all sorts of people, and had a very interesting career. He has been rewarded for his commitment and enthusiasm to the Northern Territory Police Force.

I was delighted to attend the Motor Vehicle Enthusiasts Club Christmas party on 10 December held at The Hub in Palmerston. This is a fantastic group of people who take great pride in a great variety of cars. The club was formed 20 years ago next month by people interested in all types of vehicles, regardless of the make, age or stage of restoration. I have been honoured to be the patron of that particular club, succeeding Daryl Manzie, who was patron for many years. The club has a great line-up of events during the year, where everyone can enjoy their vehicles, meet old and new friends, and see the excellent range of cars on show. This year kicked off with the very popular Variety Club ute run on Australia Day, which cruised from the 11 Mile corner of McKinnon Road, finishing for lunch at the greyhound track.

Last weekend, there was a working bee at the hangar at Parap in preparation for the Bombing of Darwin open days on 18 and 19 February. This should not be missed by any car enthusiast. I recommend anyone to go along to see some great

cars and meet some great people who are very enthusiastic about their cars. In April, there will be a trip to Jabiru meeting up with Katherine members; in May, Darwin River; and, of course, the motor show in June. There are many more events during the year. The Darwin branch of the club is ably led by president, Stuart Duncan, whilst Katherine sub-branch is presided over by Wayne Russell. These guys do a fantastic job in maintaining the enthusiasm of their members.

I turn now to schools in electorate and, in particular, Jingili school. Just before the end of the school term, my electorate office was visited by Len and Mary Richardson, who had just taken delivery of two car loads of gifts, on behalf of East Timor Sunrise Incorporated, for transportation to East Timor. These gifts were to make Christmas exciting for children at the orphanage at Leu Lau, five hours drive from Dili in East Timor. These gifts comprised over a 100 shoe boxes full of gifts from students at Jingili school. The shoe boxes mainly contained school resources made by the children such as number books, workbooks in English and Portuguese, and games, together with chalk boards, rulers, pens and pencils.

As well as the packed shoe boxes, the children at Jingili sent their sister school presents like bikes, hula hoops and soft toys. This follows the initiative of the school last year, when they sent 100 decorated shoe boxes to Leu Lau, which were opened on Christmas Day by very happy children. This is a fantastic effort by the students of Jingili, and I commend them on their community spirit and generosity.

While we are on the subject of Jingili school, I had great pleasure in attending the final assembly of the primary school and to wish the 2005 graduating class all the best for their future in high school. I seek permission to incorporate the list of names into the *Hansard* record.

Leave granted.

<i>Jack Anstey</i>	<i>John Holloway</i>
<i>Melanie Cicolini</i>	<i>Samantha Lorman</i>
<i>Deserena Duggie</i>	<i>Kathleen Withers</i>
<i>Jarrold Eggins</i>	<i>Mitchell Lockley</i>
<i>Kara Hoppo</i>	<i>Ryan Long</i>
<i>Emily Kearney</i>	<i>Michael McMahon</i>
<i>Leah Kroes</i>	<i>Samuel Sommerville</i>
<i>Joshua Galvin</i>	<i>Luke Voysey</i>
<i>Jake Gilbert</i>	
<i>Marvielyn Satorre-Martin</i>	

**Dr BURNS:** I was also pleased to hear that my Quiet Achiever Awards for the fourth term went to Jessica Harpur and Daina Brown, and to hear that they were very proud and excited to be recognised.

Similarly, I would like to talk about Moil Primary School. On Thursday 15 December, I attended the Moil 2005 presentation assembly, where the following students were presented with their graduation certificates, and I seek permission to incorporate that into the record.

Leave granted.

<i>Surya Agung</i>	<i>Tegan Spain</i>
<i>Aidan Baistow</i>	<i>Brendan Sudjana</i>
<i>Jaime Lang</i>	<i>Emma Vincent</i>
<i>Rowina Chan</i>	<i>Michelle Watson</i>
<i>Simone Corney</i>	<i>Sunday Achire</i>
<i>Mark Deveril</i>	<i>Claire O'Bryan</i>
<i>Michael Esam</i>	<i>Thomas Pisel</i>
<i>Shannon Gahan</i>	<i>Christopher Frew</i>
<i>Lara Geraghty</i>	<i>Gareth Dickens</i>
<i>Julie Jones</i>	<i>Zachary Anderson</i>
<i>Kate Jones</i>	<i>Kelvin Williams</i>
<i>Shannyn Virgo</i>	<i>Marc Nelson</i>
<i>Joel Lawton</i>	<i>Bronte Turner</i>
<i>Raymond Lay</i>	<i>Katrina Trimble</i>
<i>Jade Lee</i>	<i>Amelia Sukeharoen</i>
<i>Shelby Lock</i>	<i>Darcy Stanford</i>
<i>Maria Magoulias</i>	<i>Tiffany Hines</i>
<i>Luke Pike</i>	<i>Taylor Smith</i>
<i>Sharna Richards</i>	<i>Raylene Russell</i>
<i>Alongkorn Scott</i>	<i>Nathan Prasad</i>
<i>Daniel Nicholson</i>	<i>Davina Lay</i>
<i>John Kouros</i>	<i>Kimberely Griffey</i>
<i>Danica Eariss</i>	<i>Shannon De Been</i>
<i>Tinus Creeper</i>	<i>Christopher Campbell</i>
<i>Clancy Bennett-Kellam</i>	
<i>Jeremy Lassemillante</i>	
<i>Olson Hamilton-Smith</i>	

**Dr BURNS:** There is a lot of talent among this group. I wish every single one of them a fantastic future at high school and the enthusiasm to continue their hard work to achieve.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.