

Madam Speaker Aagaard took the Chair at 10 am.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Arafura**

Mr HENDERSON (Leader of Government Business): Madam Speaker, I move that leave of absence be granted to the member for Arafura for the remainder of this sittings due to a bereavement in the family.

Motion agreed to.

**LEAVE OF ABSENCE
Member for Blain**

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that leave of absence be granted for the member for Blain for the next three sitting days as he is currently in Taiwan undertaking a research scholarship. The scholarship is designed to foster better relations between Charles Darwin University and Fu Jen University. Aside from building stronger education links between the universities, the member for Blain will also be meeting with several companies about business opportunities between Taiwan and the Territory, including making a gas processing hub in the region. While it is unfortunate that his study tour has coincided with the sittings, it does, however, have enormous potential and have a positive impact on a number of sectors including employment and training across the Territory.

Motion agreed to.

**STATEMENT BY SPEAKER
Resignation of Member for Nelson from
Environment and Sustainable
Development Committee**

Madam SPEAKER: Honourable members, I advise that on 11 October 2007, the member for Nelson submitted a letter of resignation as a member of the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee. I table the letter.

**MOTION
Discharge of Member for Nelson from
Environment and Sustainable
Development Committee**

Mr HENDERSON (Leader of Government Business)(by leave): Madam Speaker, I move that the member for Nelson, Mr Wood, be discharged from service on the Environment and Sustainable Development Committee.

Motion agreed to.

RESPONSE TO PETITION

The CLERK: Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 100A, I inform honourable members that a response to petition No 63 has been received and circulated to honourable members.

*Petition No 63
Fogg Dam Monsoon Forest Boardwalk
Date Presented: 30 August 2007
Presented by: Mr Warren
Referred to: Minister for Parks and Wildlife
Date response due: 21 February 2008
Date response received: 15 October 2007
Date response presented: 16 October 2007*

Response

This petition is directed at the Parks and Wildlife Service and seeks to have the boardwalk at Fogg Dam repaired urgently.

A design for a replacement boardwalk has been developed using low-maintenance, long-lasting materials and construction more suited to the wet rainforest environment.

Detailed cost estimates are yet to be determined; however, preliminary estimates indicate that materials and fabrication of the boardwalk will be in the vicinity of \$1m, excluding labour.

The boardwalk will be considered for inclusion on the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts' Capital Works Program.

Funding allocation for park infrastructure works is determined in line with the priorities of the whole of the parks estate across the Northern Territory.

**MINISTERIAL REPORTS
Success of Treasury Finance
Officer-in-Training Program**

Mr STIRLING (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, today I inform the Assembly of the continued success of the Finance Officer in Training Program at Northern Territory Treasury. It is widely recognised as a program that benefits the Northern Territory's entire public service. Since its inception in 1998, many outstanding graduates have completed the program and have taken up senior management roles across the public sector where they continue to bring their strong financial management expertise to bear.

Each year, Treasury undertakes recruitment of high-quality graduates to participate in the

program. The graduates entering the program come from a variety of different disciplines including law, business, accounting, economics, commerce and public administration. There is a strong emphasis on employing locals, though some have moved from interstate to take part. It is not just sink-or-swim for the new recruits; the program provides a comprehensive training and development package designed to strengthen the government's business and finance capabilities, as well as develop individual skills. It is a year-long learning experience. Officers in training are provided with both formal courses and hands-on work experience placements in various business units within Treasury. When they complete the program at the end of the year, they have broad experience and knowledge of one of the most challenging portfolios in government, and that knowledge and experience is highly regarded across all agencies.

Treasury tries to keep as many as they can, of course, but the graduate program is a key element in Treasury's long-term strategy to fast-track high-quality graduates to middle and senior management positions. What I am excited about are the next steps in their careers - promotion within Treasury or movement across government to use their skills in Justice, DCIS, DBERD, or any of the other agencies, or even the Territory's private sector.

To the successful past Finance Officers in Training, congratulations on your achievements. To the 2007 participants, of whom there are 20, I encourage them to work hard to complete the program and see what the Territory public service has to offer them. I look forward to welcoming further graduates in 2008.

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, I thank the Treasurer for his report. This is a good news story. It serves the Territory and the participants well. We are all very well served by NT Treasury and, with government, encourage further recruitment. This is a wonderful opportunity. The strategy, as the Treasurer said, has been in place for some time and long may it continue.

Electrofishing Research

Mr NATT (Primary Industry and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I report to the House on my Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines' use of cutting-edge technology in the area of fisheries research - significantly, an innovative and cost-effective method for monitoring freshwater fish in Territory rivers and billabongs called the Electrofisher.

The Electrofisher is a \$25 000 custom designed boat which has equipment aboard

allowing it to pass electrical current between two electrodes suspended in the water beneath the boat. More specifically, the unit can produce up to 2000 watts of electrical current. The unit sends a pulsed DC charge into the water between an anode and a cathode separated by a few metres of water. The electrical current applied temporarily stuns the fish allowing them to easily be captured.

The voltage and current are variable and are adjusted depending on the conductivity of water, the size of the fish present, and the area of electrical field required. The objective is to sample the fish present without causing physical injury or significant stress.

In the past, my department has relied on a range of nets when undertaking similar research. This process was time consuming and limited to areas that could be checked due to the restrictions of net sizes. When using nets, scientists must undertake sampling when fish are most active including at night. With the Electrofisher, my department's researchers can undertake fresh water surveys in a more efficient and cost-effective manner.

Initially, the Electrofisher was used for a survey being carried out on the upper and middle reaches of the Daly River. This is a joint project between my department, Charles Darwin University and the Griffiths University Centre for Ravine Landscapes funded through the Tropical Rivers and Coastal Knowledge program. The project's main purpose is to determine the river flows required for the maintenance of our fish populations. This includes identifying fish species, their abundance and their size.

One of the positive effects of using the Electrofisher is that rare and new species of fish can be discovered. Because this method does not injure or harm the fish, researchers are able to find a greater variety of species. A wonderful example of this technology at work was the find of a rare fish not seen for over 14 years in the Northern Territory. It turned up while researchers were conducting a survey in the Finnis River near Batchelor. The specimen, Lorentz's grunter is particularly significant as it helps scientists build a more accurate picture of our ecosystems, which in turn assists us to make better informed management decisions regarding our waterways.

The Electrofisher has also been used for research undertaken with the Wagiman rangers. This is a fascinating mix of fisheries research and social scientific determinations, meaning the project is ascertaining the social significance that certain species of fish have to traditional owners of the Daly River district. I congratulate my Fisheries department researcher, Dr Blair Grace, for

rediscovering the species, and I invite members of the Assembly to inspect it. I have placed it in a tank in the foyer of Parliament House where it can be viewed.

As you can appreciate, the range of uses and projects for which the electrofisher is suited is virtually unlimited. Since arriving at Fisheries, the Electrofisher has been in constant use. It has been used to check my department's impoundment stocking program, conducting audits in Manton Dam, Lake Bennett and Mt Todd. It leaves today for its next project, this time in the Howard River in Darwin's rural area.

The Electrofisher is just one example of the equipment used within Fisheries to obtain high quality research data which can be applied to the management of our fisheries.

Mrs MILLER (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his report. When I first heard of this technology I was a little sceptical to say the least. I was concerned about the effect it would have on our fish - it is not exactly a nice thing to stick an electronic probe into water to stun the fish. However, I have been following what has been happening with the electrofish probe. Even in your report this morning you said that a once considered extinct species of fish has been found. So there is some really important information being uncovered.

It is important to have knowledge of fish species and find out what we have in our fresh water systems, and also their movements. If that is what this is going to bring as an outcome for the fishing industry, and having an understanding of where our fish move to and what we do have, it is a very important initiative. I look forward to hearing more in the future as to what this electrofish probe will uncover.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for his report. It leaves itself open to saying that this is the origin of the term 'stunned mullet', especially if it comes from the Daly River where there are plentiful supplies of mullet.

It is a great concept. I heard about it on *The Country Hour* about a month ago. It has a lot of value, as you said, minister, for fish identification, abundance and size. I am pleased that they are doing work in the Howard River area. I have been invited to talk to some of the people who are involved in those studies, so I will be interested to see what happens in that area.

As it finds more species, it opens up more opportunities. For instance, we have a gentleman in the rural area, Dave Wilson, who has been a pioneer in developing new native species – as we know them; probably Aboriginal people have

known all the time – of local fish, native fish that can be used in the aquarium industry. As you said, this new technique is finding unknown species. It is interesting to know we have found a grunter. I thought he would be very comfortable at Parliament House with a name like that.

However, we are finding things that we would not have been able to find before. That is important. Dave Wilson is leading the way in developing an economy based on the sale of fresh water native fish, which is important. I congratulate the department on the work they are doing, and I welcome the report today.

Mr NATT (Primary Industry and Fisheries): Madam Speaker, I thank members for their support of this project. It is important and valuable research they are undertaking, and to have a significant discovery of this magnitude is great. To find a fish that has not been in our waters for 14 years is fantastic. We found two of them and they were 40 km apart. I understand the two of them are in the aquarium this morning. That highlights the great work the department is undertaking and ensures that our waterways and ecosystems in the freshwater systems in the Northern Territory can be maintained in the future.

Truck Safety

Ms LAWRIE (Infrastructure and Transport): Madam Speaker, truck safety is an important issue Australia-wide, especially in the Northern Territory where we have very large trucks, such as road trains, travelling long distances. The Australian Trucking Association has a very responsible approach to safety in their industry. An example of this is that they recently wrote to me requesting random drug testing of drivers.

There have been a number of recent technological innovations in truck safety recently mainly coming out of Europe. At the invitation of trucking magnet, Lindsay Fox, I recently joined a delegation including a minister and officials from other states and the Commonwealth government to look at the latest in truck safety technology in Europe. I invited Peter Goed, the Executive Officer of the Australian Trucking Association in the Territory, on this trip so that this Territory trucking expert could have a firsthand look at this new technology.

We were given demonstrations of the intelligent safety systems which alert drivers if they drift out of their lane; provide for brakes automatically if they get too close to the vehicle in front; and a stability control that prevents a truck from tipping over. We were also given briefings on the introduction of digital tacograph technology in the European Union. A digital tacograph can be best described as an electronic logbook and,

amongst its many features, can help deal with one of the biggest safety issues in the industry - fatigue.

While the technology will help save lives and make roads safer for all road users, it has the potential to assist productivity and reduce operating costs. Tomorrow night, Peter Goed and I will host a trucking information forum to discuss assistance with local operators. I will also be hosting a similar forum in Alice Springs next week. I want to work in partnership with local industry to consider how such technology could be introduced. I will also be working with fellow Australian ministers through the Australian Transport Council. I particularly want to thank Peter Goed for joining me on this trip as his industry insights assisted me and, more broadly, the other delegates.

While we were in Europe, Peter and I also attended the World Road Congress in France at the invitation of the Deputy Prime Minister, Mark Vaile. The congress was very worthwhile because many of its key themes were central to our current and future Australian and Northern Territory transport needs. These themes centred around international innovation and trends and included remote road provision, urban road congestion, road safety management, and economic, ecological and social transport sustainability. There were more than 4000 congress participants and exhibitors, of which approximately 70 were delegates from Australia and New Zealand. Ministers responsible for road policy from 40 countries attended the congress.

The common theme to most discussions was the importance of roads in achieving both economic and, importantly, social outcomes. While the importance of roads to the economy has long been acknowledged, road funding priorities are now being looked at through a social prism in many countries. Several key sessions focused on examples of improved road infrastructure that could lead to greater social outcomes in the underdeveloped areas of the world. As we know, in the Northern Territory our rural roads are underdeveloped with only 23% of our road networks sealed. Improving our roads is an essential component, not only for providing economic opportunities, but also providing social opportunities right across the Territory, particularly in our regions.

Madam Speaker, I thank Peter Goed for joining me, as his industry insights really did assist me and, more broadly, he was able to share them with other national delegation members and with the companies we visited. I know that Peter considered the trip very worthwhile. It included many innovative ideas to assist the trucking industry. I look forward to discussing these ideas

and innovations with the Territory's trucking industry and pursuing truck safety at a national level.

Mrs MILLER (Katherine): Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her report. The ATA NT put out quite a comprehensive report of the trip on which Peter Goed accompanied the minister. I thank her for taking Peter on that trip because I believe he plays an important part in the trucking industry in the Northern Territory.

Safety in the trucking industry is of prime importance. Unfortunately, we had a terrible tragedy north of Pine Creek earlier this year. That highlighted the need for drug testing of truck drivers even more so.

One of the things Peter mentioned in his report was the practical demonstration you saw at the Mercedes Benz test track - and these were really interesting. The intelligence lane assist that warns a truck driver when he or she strays from a traffic lane is really important, because you are pulling three trailers behind you in the Northern Territory. That would be extremely helpful. The intelligence proximity controls tells the driver how close and how quickly stopping is required to prevent a rear end smash with a vehicle in the same lane ahead. I almost had that coming up to these sittings, because some very inconsiderate driver decided to slow down completely, without any indication, with a road train cruising nicely along behind him. The road train driver had to brake, swerve swiftly to the right and, unfortunately, nearly connected with somebody who was about to pass him. It is important that the trucking industry look at these safety devices. There is also the active brake assist, which automatically applies the brakes, and a stability control which keeps the vehicle stable to prevent a rollover in case of swerving.

Madam Speaker, I thank the minister for her report, and for taking people who are so closely associated with the industry with her on her trip.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I also thank the minister for her report. I know that she is concentrating on the bigger picture, however, I believe there are some issues in relation to trucking in areas around the Darwin region. As there is so much development occurring at the moment, one of the problems we have is that there is a large number of trucks moving from the rural area into the city area. Some of those are triples. They are travelling on roads that have speed limits of 100 km/h. I sometimes wonder whether that is an appropriate speed, especially with the amount of traffic on our roads at the present time. It is one of those areas that need to be reviewed.

I am not saying it should happen, but as our traffic numbers build up in the rural, Palmerston and Darwin areas, at the same time you have triples travelling through, fully laden with sand, rock or gravel, it needs a review of whether that is a safe practice and whether speed limits should be lowered maybe to 80 km/h.

The other area that sometimes people get a little annoyed about is the covering of loads, especially loads that are gravel or road base material. This is sometimes left on the mud guards of trucks and if you are behind them you could get a smashed or chipped window, and with sand, you can get sand blasted. That is a bit annoying at times. The minister might be able to tell us whether the department keeps a regular eye on those sorts of things. Problems can also be caused where a driver tries to pass a truck because simply sitting behind them they are getting blasted with sand.

Minister, I thank you for your report. I thought I would bring to your attention a few other issues.

Ms LAWRIE (Infrastructure and Transport): Madam Speaker, I thank the members opposite for their support. I wholeheartedly agree with the issues raised by the member for Nelson. We have an increasing issue with large trucks entering into streets that were not designed for them. That really highlights the importance of the Tiger Brennan Drive extension. It is our main freight route coming in, and we need that extension to cater for the increasing number of freight trucks coming to our port area.

Regarding the covering of loads, the government has introduced new regulations which mandate the tarping of loads for trucks over three tonnes. We are working with industry to see how that goes. We have not gone lower than three tonnes. We are having a look at that, but it was those large trucks over three tonnes where the tarping of loads was seen as the key priority. That was an initiative commenced by my predecessor, the member for Johnston, the regulation phase of which I was able to see through.

The issue of trucks on urban roads is a national issue; it is causing congestion. It is certainly not a desirable situation where you have the mixed road use of light vehicles, cars, and trucks ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Reports noted pursuant to standing orders.

**TAXATION ADMINISTRATION BILL
(Serial 108)
FIRST HOME OWNER GRANT
AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 109)
PAY-ROLL TAX AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 110)
REVENUE LAW REFORM (STAMP DUTY) BILL
(Serial 111)**

Continued from 23 August 2007.

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, despite the weight of pages contained in the bills and the explanatory memoranda, the opposition's response will be relatively brief. Given the amount of information, the Treasurer's second reading speech was relatively brief. There is good reason for that. The changes are quite straightforward and are supported by the opposition. As the Treasurer said in his second reading speech, they aim to put in place a new taxation administration framework which provides standard rules for administration of payroll tax and stamp duties.

I note that the Treasurer, elsewhere in his second reading speech, said that there was not a change of policy; it was just, in essence, a tidying up of various legislation. I note also that the government sought and obtained input of, who the Treasurer described as, expert advisors and other groups, and that they have had input into the development of legislation which is always important.

As the Treasurer said, the Taxation Administration Bill provides greater certainty on how it is to be administered. It tends not to be, or has not tended to be, user-friendly legislation and the government's attempt to simplify it is certainly welcomed. We also note that the changes provide greater consistency across the states and territories. That is always to be welcomed when it comes to legislation.

The Treasurer also made reference to a contemporary legislative drafting style that is pleasing. Although my view, increasingly with legislation or bills brought into the House, is that some of the drafting style could be argued to be too contemporary, there was, nevertheless, a need to update some of the drafting style.

I note that the Treasurer, on the 23 August, in his second reading speech said:

One of the key reasons for introducing new taxation administration arrangements is to standardise administration practices into one act that covers payroll tax, stamp duties and, to a lesser extent, the first home owner grant.

That is to be welcomed. The Treasurer also spoke about flexibility in taxation administration which is something any government worth its salt would strive for. There are also, interestingly, provisions for a framework of arrangements to pay tax by instalments, where a taxpayer is experiencing financial hardship. That is also welcomed.

Treasurer, the opposition clearly, and for obvious reasons, supports these bills.

Mr KIELY (Sanderson): Madam Speaker, I support the Taxation Administration Bill 2007, the Revenue Law Reform (Stamp Duty) Bill 2007, the Pay-roll Tax Amendment Bill 2007, and the First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill 2007 introduced by the Treasurer. These reforms have been a long time in the making due in part to the extensive consultation with stakeholders. It is consultation we needed to do to ensure we get these important reforms right.

Taxation administration perhaps does not excite many members of the general public, but it means a lot to business people who need to be able to quickly and easily comply with their tax obligations so that they can devote their energies to improving and expanding their business in the Territory. They do not want to be wading through outdated, inconsistent administrative arrangements, or paying someone else to wade through it for them. That is why, I am very pleased to say, these business bills are business friendly. These bills will help ensure that local Northern Territory businesses do not have to spend undue time getting their tax liabilities sorted. We all know that time is one of the most expensive overheads to any business, be they small, medium or large.

These reforms are a concrete and practical step government can take to help business operating here. As noted by the Treasurer, the new taxation administration act will provide common rules for the administration of payroll tax and stamp duty relating to the assessment of tax liabilities, refunds of tax, interest and penalty tax, returns, the payment recovery of tax, record keeping rules, investigations, disclosure of information, objections and appeals and the prosecution of tax offences. This new taxation administration act contains more detail than existing laws and will provide greater certainty.

Last week, this Assembly passed a motion setting out what the Martin government has done to listen to business and to assist to reduce unnecessary regulatory burdens. Members may recall that the opposition rather meekly called to set up another sub-committee to look at reducing direct cost to business by reviewing NT government administration compliance

obligations. In the debate, the Treasurer discussed some of the consultative bodies and measures we have taken to reduce the burden on business. With these reforms today, another achievement can be added to that list. These efforts stand in stark contrast to the CLP. You just have to wonder if the CLP have any genuine concern for NT business. If they were genuine, if they did really care for small business, and if they put a lot of thought and wide-spread consultation into their initiatives, why did the Leader of the Opposition happily give her support to the shadow Treasurer, Terry Mills, to go on a Taiwanese government-sponsored four week trip and miss out on debating this important initiative to reduce business tax and compliance costs?

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr KIELY: We all know that the opposition understood this bill to be debated this week. We also know that Mr Mills advised the Leader of the Opposition weeks ago, apparently, that he was going to Taiwan. If the opposition does not have the capacity to understand what these bills are about, which must make everyone wonder if they were truly genuine about reducing costs to business operators ...

Ms CARNEY: A point of order; Madam Speaker! We are used to the member for Sanderson making speeches and the women in the Northern Territory are used to hearing what he has to say as well. I ask that you direct him not to make a political speech in the course of debating quite straightforward legislation. If he has something to say about the legislation, then say it. Madam Speaker, if the shoe was on the other foot, government would object and say get on with it. We say get on with it.

Madam SPEAKER: Leader of the Opposition, there is no point of order. Order!

Mr WARREN: Madam Speaker, I would like to speak to the point of order. I think it ...

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Goyder, I did rule there was no point of order. Resume your seat. Member for Sanderson, please continue with your speech, keeping as much as possible to the bills. I remind you also, member for Sanderson, that we refer to members by their electorate, not by their personal names.

Mr KIELY: Certainly, Madam Speaker, I take your advice on board. I thank the Leader of the Opposition for listening so closely to the speech. It is only a shame that the shadow Treasurer was not here to hear it.

Ms CARNEY: Madam Speaker, the member well knows that he is not to point to the absence or otherwise to a member of this House.

Mr Kiely: He is on leave.

A member: Read your standing orders.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! It is true that you are not to refer to the presence or absence of members. It does not make any difference if they are on leave, member for Sanderson.

Mr KIELY: All right. He was given leave of absence, Madam Speaker.

As I was saying, such is the CLP way that the shadow Treasurer so arrogantly does not even bother to turn up for this debate.

Ms CARNEY: Madam Speaker, I ask that you once again direct the member for Sanderson, who knows the standing orders, surely, by now. You have told him not to do it. He has done it again; he is dissenting from your ruling.

Madam SPEAKER: Member for Sanderson, I ask you to withdraw your last comments.

Mr KIELY: I will withdraw, Madam Speaker, I am happy to.

The most significant policy changes introduced in these bills are:

- requiring taxpayers and tax advisers to disclose up-front all information relevant to the taxation assessment. There is currently no requirement to disclose any information unless specifically demanded by the Commissioner of Taxes;
- enabling tax debts of a company to be recovered from its directors, but only after the company has repeatedly failed to pay its tax debts and its directors have failed to act on a notice from the commissioner requiring the company to remedy its tax default;
- securing any unpaid tax debts is a change against land acquired as a result of a transaction. Ultimately, the Supreme Court could order on an application from the commissioner the sale of the land to recover any long-standing tax debts. A similar power currently exists for landholder stamp duty;
- providing the commissioner with the ability to reach a negotiated assessment

with the taxpayer. This will only apply under very limited circumstances when it is difficult to determine a tax liability. Negotiated assessments will not be able to be disputed by the taxpayer as these assessments can only be made with the taxpayer's agreement;

- providing a five-year period in which to reassess a tax liability. There is currently a three-year reassessment period for stamp duty and no limit for payroll tax;
- providing greater guidance in the legislation for the imposition of penalty tax. Penalties for up to 200% of outstanding tax currently apply with discretion for this to be reduced, and
- enabling the commissioner to offset refunds of tax against other Territory tax debts.

Another component I consider especially important is the move to uniformity between Territory law and other jurisdictions. Whether it is larger Territory companies looking to expand interstate, or interstate companies wanting to open an office here, different tax administration law makes that move just that bit harder.

I strongly approve of the move to limit or codify the Taxation Commissioner's powers in relation to enter and search property. Legislation should not give authorities open slather when it comes to someone's personal property, particularly their home. By codifying exactly the commissioner's powers, it corrects a long imbalance.

I also approve of the system allowing negotiated assessments where, through no fault of the taxpayer, obtaining information to exactly quantify the tax owed is too difficult or expensive for both the government and the taxpayer.

The new provisions provide a sensible, certain solution so all parties can move on without an undetermined tax liability hanging over their heads. The Territory economy is booming. Over this sitting, the Treasurer has set out great things in key economic indicators, labour force, building activity, job advertisements. The Martin government must do what it can to keep economic development strong.

As I noted earlier, there has been extensive consultation on these tax amendments. I acknowledge the input and constructive role played by the Territory Taxation Administration Liaison Committee for their well considered feedback provided to the Treasurer and revenue office over the course of the drafting of these bills.

Madam Speaker, I commend the Treasurer for his ability to simplify and minimise the administrative and compliance burden that businesses endure to ensure they meet their legal obligations to the community. Thanks to his lead, Territory business will now find it much easier, less time consuming and therefore less of a drain on their bottom line to assess their tax debt. These taxation amendments do not bring with them any increase whatsoever in the taxation liability of Northern Territory companies; indeed, they make it easier and more efficient for our business operators.

Finally, I acknowledge the commitment and professionalism of the Commissioner of Taxation and his staff in supporting the Treasurer in his efforts to bring greater efficiency to our taxation regime and to make it more business friendly. I am pleased to be able to support the Treasurer on this important legislative reform package.

Mr WOOD (Nelson): Madam Speaker, I support the taxation administration bills today. I thank the minister for the briefing we received on these matters. It is quite straightforward. Basically, this is bringing our taxation arrangements up to date. It appears that the legislation was put in place about 30 years ago, and obviously times have changed since then. There is taxation in Australia that did not exist then as it does now, such as the GST. We know things have moved on and it naturally would be a sensible thing to update our taxation legislation and make some of the powers of the commissioner clearer.

There is also the section on providing more prescriptive, transparent and contemporary investigative powers. As we were told at the briefing, at present, people can enter a home without any warrant required. They can just walk into a house and ask for information - that is one of the areas that has been amended so that people do have some rights. It does not necessarily apply to a business but, in relation to a house, I believe the government has changed that to allow the homeowner some rights in that area.

The other area was where you received submissions. I gather some people did not necessarily agree with this, but it was the disclosure tax advisors were required to make. I gather there were some people who felt that that was not necessary. The reasons behind that - maybe they felt that the existing laws were ones they were comfortable with, whereas these changes seem to mean that they will not be able to withhold information, especially if that withholding of information was simply to avoid a tax, as appears to have happened previously.

The other area which did surprise me - there were three rounds of consultation undertaken on the new taxation administrative arrangements, one with the general public in 2002-03, and two with the Territory Taxation Administration Liaison Committee in 2006-07. It highlights to me that, on some things, this government will give adequate time for consultation. Here we have nearly five years of consultation, but when it comes to the *Local Government Act*, for instance, as reported even in a letter which arrived on my desk today from the Alice Springs Town Council, they are asking that there be much more time for adequate consultation. I support what they are asking for. Major changes, that is, entire ...

Mr KIELY: A point of order, Madam Speaker! It goes to the subject of relevance.

Mr WOOD: It certainly does.

Mr KIELY: We are debating the tax bills here.

Members interjecting.

Madam SPEAKER: Order!

Mr WOOD: To the relevance, Madam Speaker ...

Mr KIELY: Well, you know, relevance.

Madam SPEAKER: Order! Please resume your seat. Member for Nelson, continue.

Mr WOOD: Madam Speaker, I am highlighting the fact that this taxation administrative arrangement gave people adequate time to deal with fairly complex issues. People like Fran Kilgarriff, the Mayor of Alice Springs, have written saying that ...

Mr Kiely: Wrong, wrong, wrong.

Mr WOOD: People like the Mayor of Alice Springs have written to, I presume parliamentarians, asking that there be adequate time. In fact, she is asking that it not be presented to parliament until the February sittings. They are saying that this particular act requires a lot of consultation. All I am saying is that the government is willing to give five years of consultation - and I am not saying the *Local Government Act* needs five years of consultation - what I am saying is that the *Taxation Act* is very important. It required considerable consultation. The *Local Government Act* is also very important, because it covers a vast number of issues for all councils, especially the new councils, and we have to look at what that effect is on existing councils. I am asking that the government also provide the same adequate consultation for councils to look at that act.

Notwithstanding that, I support the new taxation administration arrangements. I imagine there was a lot of work involved in doing this, it is no simple thing. I must admit that I have not read every ...

Members interjecting.

Mr WOOD: I know, I am not doing a Dave Tollner, however, I got down to some of the stuff here where I was having trouble with it. Some of the formulas were a little difficult. The prescribed amount, for instance, means in relation to an employer:

the amount calculated in accordance with the following formula TW over TW plus IW multiplied by 1 250 000 C divided by D , where TW is a total of the taxable wages paid or payable by the employer during the financial year; IW is the total of the interstate wages paid or payable by the employer during the financial year; C is the number of days in the financial year in respect of which wages, disregarding foreign wages, were paid or payable by the employer; and D , is the number of days in the financial year.

Minister, I have to say ...

Mr Stirling: A miracle is at work, Gerry.

Mr WOOD: I am sorry about that. Give me local government any day.

The briefing was important because it gave us a better understanding. You also have here amending acts; by amending those acts, you are bringing them into line with the new bill. That makes perfectly good sense and I commend the government for doing that.

I do have some idea of tax, minister. My father was a State Taxation Inspector for many years, so I know the amount of work. The complexity of taxation law is something that is not easy for average people to understand. By bringing this up-to-date and putting it in language that is more clearly understood you are helping people affected by this taxation. Even though employers might not be particularly interested or want to pay the tax that you are charging, at least they will have a better understanding of what you are talking about and the manner in which they are to pay that tax, the manner in which they can appeal against decisions, and also that there are penalties for the evasion of tax, which will be clearly stated.

Treasurer, I support the bills that have been put forward today.

Mrs BRAHAM (Braitling): Madam Speaker, I also support the bills. I am placing my trust in you, Treasurer, because, like the member for Nelson, I have not read every bit of the bills. I also believe they are far too vast and too great for me to do.

I thought it was interesting that the first taxation arrangement bill came in, in 1978. It must have been one of the very first bills enacted by the new Assembly under self-government of the Northern Territory. Of course, it has been amended many times since then, as we scroll down the screen. It is interesting that this is taking over that particular bill and putting in the new administrative arrangements. In a way, Treasurer, you are creating history. I hope it is a good move that you are making. I can understand why some businesses may be a little wary of the investigation powers that have been made more explicit on how businesses can be entered and searched, and that there is no need for a search warrant for that requirement, if I recall from the briefing. That is something that we would really need to ensure the businesses feel quite comfortable with.

When we talk about tax, we get a little twitchy also because what affects most of us is our income tax. This is really only talking about stamp duty tax, payroll tax, tax paid by mining companies, and the royalties that the government collects. We are talking about the first homebuyer taxes and things like that. It is not something that most of us come across every day within our business arrangements; it is only something that the Northern Territory government imposes upon us. I wonder whether the Treasurer has any inclination to increase taxes now he has changed these administrative arrangements. Is he setting the threshold to also look at the tax rules of the Northern Territory and what business will have to pay? I believe the goodwill that has come out through the discussion around this, people would be concerned if this was something that was going to lead to higher taxes. A bit of a grin over there, so perhaps I am just dreaming. I hope so.

If you get a chance to stand up in this House to say something and you see an opportunity to make a point about something else, why not? That is, basically, what the member for Nelson was doing. Good on him for doing it. He does not seem to miss many opportunities to have his say. That is what we are here for.

I thank the advisors for the briefing. Even now we probably do not fully understand all the implications of what you are introducing. I hope it will provide a better system of taxation for Territorians. That is what we want: a clear and concise method of people knowing exactly what they should be paying, how they should be paying it, and if they are having difficulty, how they can, in

the long run, have some leeway to work it out. Too often we see people in the Territory going bankrupt for all sorts of reasons. It is something we need to prevent. Treasurer, I support your bills.

Mr STIRLING (Treasurer): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for the strength of her support in relation to this amendment bill; and the members for Sanderson, Nelson, and Braitling for their supportive comments. It would, I imagine, be one of the very first items of legislation passed way back then in order to set the scene for the broadening powers under self-government.

In relation to the search warrant situation, raised by the member for Braitling. I am not sure if I heard correctly but just to put it on the record, we have gone from very wide ranging powers for those inspectors in the sense that they did not have to have a search warrant at all, and are now having to obtain one. It has actually reined in long held and very wide powers of search and seizure that our inspectors had under the existing legislation; powers that have since gone in every other part of Australia due to reform overhaul and amendment of this legislation. And powers, if they were tested, may have struggled to survive the light of day given the shift in Australian law over time.

I thank those people who contributed to the debate. Taxation administration reforms are never going to be the most exciting amendment bill before parliament, but it is critically important for Territory taxpayers and businesses, and vitally important for the Territory and its government. The bills introduce new taxation administration arrangements. They will provide standard rules for the administration of payroll tax and stamp duties in the one item of legislation. The new taxation administration laws will reduce both taxpayer compliance costs and government administration costs by providing much greater detail, clarity and certainty on the way taxes will be administered.

The current administration arrangements are nearly 30 years old. They are specific for stamp duties and payroll tax, and inconsistent in some places. They are out of step with contemporary taxation administration arrangements in other states, and they do not adequately provide for aggressive schemes used by, what I am pleased to say, are a minority of taxpayers to delay or avoid tax. The reforms are necessary to provide minimum compliance costs but ensuring that proper tax is paid.

There are four bills, the Taxation Administration Bill, the Revenue Law Reform

(Stamp Duty) Bill, the Pay-roll Tax Amendment Bill and the First Home Owner Grant Amendment Bill.

The Taxation Administration Bill will provide standardised administrative rules for payroll tax and stamp duty. It is based on tax administration legislation in New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT, ensuring that we will have greater consistency between the states. The Revenue Law Reform (Stamp Duty) Bill repeals the current *Stamp Duty Act*, places all stamp duty provisions in the current *Taxation Administration Act*, and changes the name of that act to the *Stamp Duty Act*. It was the most practical approach to take recognising that most stamp duty provisions currently reside in the *Taxation Administration Act*.

The package of bills amends the Stamp Duty, Payroll Tax and First Home Owner Grant legislation to implement the new tax administration arrangements. They include the removal of administrative provisions; the addition of some new definitions; the addition of references to the new Taxation Administration legislation; and updating some provisions for contemporary legislative drafting styles. Parliamentary Counsel has updated many provisions that required amendment, particularly those relating to stamp duties to reflect contemporary legislative drafting. It has resulted in changes to the appearance of these provisions. However, the way in which stamp duties and payroll tax applies has, importantly, not been altered.

There are no new taxes; the amount of tax payable will not increase. Compliance costs for both taxpayers and government should decrease. The new Taxation Administration Act is based on the Taxation Administration legislation in several other jurisdictions, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT. It also adopts features from the Taxation Administration legislation in Queensland and Western Australia.

The Taxation Administration acts of the other states have been in place for up to 10 years. The Territory was not part of that Taxation Administration rewrite process undertaken by New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania and the ACT in the 1990s. The government announced the review of the current *Taxation Administration Act* in June 2002 in its economic development strategy *Building a Better Territory*.

New legislation has taken time to draft and finalise because of major national tax reform during the same period, and extensive consultation undertaken on the draft taxation administration legislation. Three rounds of consultation were undertaken on the proposed act: one with the general public in 2002-03 and two with the Territory Taxation Administration

Liaison Committee in 2006-07. This committee comprises representatives from industry, professional associations and taxation advisors. Sixteen submissions were received in total. There was overall support for the new arrangements, but issues were raised about specific provisions. The draft legislation was amended in response to submissions received. No consultation was taken on changes to stamp duty or payroll tax legislation because those changes do not alter the way stamp duty and payroll tax is charged.

Under the taxpayer and tax advisory information disclosure requirement, taxpayers and their advisors must advise the commissioner in writing of all relevant facts and circumstances that affect a taxpayer's tax liability when an instrument or return is submitted for an assessment of tax; an application is submitted for an assessment of tax; a written request is made of a taxpayer or their tax advisor to disclose information about a tax liability the commissioner proposes to assess; or facts or circumstances become known to a taxpayer or their tax advisor that shows that the commissioner has assessed the tax liability incorrectly. Placing an obligation of taxpayers and tax advisors to provide information up-front will reduce taxpayer compliance costs as the information will be provided at one time rather than being extracted as the commissioner becomes aware of that information.

Under the current arrangements, there is no obligation to provide any information to enable a tax liability to be correctly assessed. The onus is on the commissioner to demand specific information from the person when it is not voluntarily provided so that a correct assessment can be made. It is an inefficient process that can cause unnecessary costs and delays in making a tax assessment.

This process enables someone to frustrate the making of a tax assessment by withholding information. Several recent examples have been uncovered of tax advisors using the lack of an information disclosure requirement in the current legislation to withhold information from the commissioner to avoid tax. No law abiding taxpayer or tax advisor would condone someone deliberately withholding information to avoid tax. Placing an onus to disclose the information on both the taxpayer and tax advisor will dissuade taxpayers who are considering withholding information from so doing, knowing that someone else is also obliged to provide that information.

This requirement only applies to tax advisors engaged for Territory tax matters. The legislation makes it very clear that the requirement only applies to tax advisors engaged by a taxpayer to prepare a return or instrument that will be used to assess the taxpayer's payroll tax or stamp duty

liability, submit such an instrument or return to the commissioner, or provide information or make submissions about the taxpayer's payroll tax or stamp duty liability including penalty tax and interest. There is no requirement for a tax advisor not engaged to perform specific services relating to Territory taxes to disclose any information about Territory taxes. For example, a person only engaged as an income tax agent of a client would not be required to disclose stamp duty information about that client.

Taxpayers and tax advisors are only required to disclose the relevant information in their possession. There is no obligation to research or audit a matter to ensure compliance with this requirement. A tax advisor would usually have most relevant information in their possession to properly advise the taxpayer on a particular matter, including the tax implications of the transaction. The provision only requires disclosure of the information to enable a correct tax assessment to be made; it does not cover communications over which legal professional privilege apply. All other states and territories require taxpayers to fully disclose information relevant to the assessment of a tax liability. Victoria, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania also require tax advisors to disclose information relevant to the assessment of a tax liability. Those states have not experienced any adverse impacts from placing an information disclosure obligation on tax advisors. There does not appear to have been any representation to remove or modify the information disclosure requirements that relate to tax advisors in those jurisdictions.

Directors of a company will only become liable for the outstanding tax debt of a company after the company has not acted on a notice issued to its directors requiring the company to remedy its tax default by paying the tax; entering into an instalment arrangement to pay the tax; entering into voluntary administration under the *Corporations Act*; or entering into liquidation. Tax includes: payroll tax; stamp duties; interest; penalty tax; and any other amounts payable to the Commissioner of Territory Revenue. The provision is designed to ensure directors of a company take commercially sensible actions to resolve debts, and it is to be expected from companies with good corporate governance arrangements and necessary to meet other legal requirements for the proper administration of companies.

The Northern Territory Law Society supported this measure. The Law Society considers it may assist creditors receive greater distributions than might otherwise be the case. Action taken by the commissioner would prevent the continued trading of insolvent companies, preserving more assets

for distribution among all creditors. In New South Wales, Western Australia and the ACT, similar laws exist for directors of companies, however, Western Australia's laws only apply to the non-payment of payroll tax, whereas those in New South Wales and the ACT have wider application. The Australian government also has similar powers against directors of companies for the recovery of Pay As You Go tax.

Where a tax liability is determined by the value of property, the commissioner may require the taxpayer to provide a written valuation of the property. The commissioner may obtain a valuation from the Valuer-General, or another valuer if, not satisfied with the valuation provided by the taxpayer, or the taxpayer fails to provide a valuation within the time allowed. The commissioner's costs of obtaining a valuation can be recovered from the taxpayer if the valuation obtained by the commissioner exceeds the taxpayer's valuation by 15% or more; or the taxpayer fails to provide the valuation. This reflects the intent that the costs of obtaining a valuation will only be recovered where the taxpayer has provided a valuation that is well below the actual market value. The power of cost recovery is necessary to dissuade fraudulent or misleading valuations being provided, and several examples have arisen recently of questionable valuations being provided to support submissions being advanced by taxpayers and tax advisors.

All other states and territories can compel a taxpayer to provide a valuation of property. All other states and territories have the ability to obtain their own valuations, and all other states and territories, except Western Australia, can recover the costs of obtaining valuations from the taxpayer. Only Victoria requires the commissioner's valuation to exceed the taxpayer's valuation before the costs can be recovered. Victoria has 15%, similar to that proposed for the Territory.

Madam Speaker, the process started under my predecessor back in June 2002, a little over five years. In the making of this legislation there was quite comprehensive consultation with different aspects of the financial world, as required as each stage of reform was added to the bill. I record my thanks to Territory Revenue Commissioner, Craig Vukman, and Ivan Basei, who is here in support of the passage of the legislation today, and the staff at the Revenue office inside Treasury for what has been a tremendous professional commitment to a long-running and very major task, and that is the overhaul and amendment to the *Taxation Administration Act*.

Motion agreed to; bills read a second time.

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

Motion agreed to; bills read a third time.

**LAW REFORM (DUST DISEASES)
AMENDMENT BILL
(Serial 116)**

Continued from 30 August 2007.

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader): Madam Speaker, as with the last bill, I will be relatively brief. I wait with interest to hear whatever contribution the member for Sanderson wishes to make.

The opposition supports this bill which is targeted at amending the law of statutory limitations in the Territory for actions arising out of injury caused by dust borne diseases; an obvious example, of course, is asbestos-related injuries.

The bill does two things. First, it extends the limitation to bring an action for an injury caused by dust from three years to an indefinite period. That is because dust-related injuries can manifest themselves decades after exposure. Second, the current law prevents actions for pain and suffering, known as general damages, from surviving a person's death. The amendment will allow for these actions to remain on-foot and carried on by the person's estate, which is reasonable in all of the circumstances.

It would have been impossible to read the bill and the second reading speech and not be mindful of the reprehensible way in which the James Hardie Company acted with respect to workers injured during their time with that company. Although the Attorney-General did not, I believe, make any reference to that case, the way I read it, I took it to mean that this bill, in so many ways, is designed to ensure that disgraceful incidents like that do not happen in our own jurisdiction, in addition to ensuring that actions survive and are carried on by a person's estate.

For those very sound reasons, Madam Speaker, we are very happy to support the bill. I congratulate the Attorney-General for presenting the bill to the House.

Mr WARREN (Goyder): Madam Speaker, I support the Law Reform (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2007. I commend the government as this is an important bill. I believe the opposition will, undoubtedly, be supporting this bill because it goes beyond politics. This is an important aspect of our lives insofar as protection of people when they come across situations such as this. It is very sad to hear the stories that we

do. I am sure that people on both sides of the House feel compassion and empathy with the families and the victims of such situations.

The purpose of the bill is to amend two acts to ensure victims and their families receive access to fair compensation. It is most important that we keep our laws abreast of what is happening elsewhere and look at other jurisdictions and what is happening in the broader scheme of things. It is important that we take our rightful place in Australia as far as protecting our citizens in regard to things like this.

I am not a lawyer, so I guess I look at things more compassionately. What struck me about the whole aspect of this bill is the situation behind the things which happen in everyday life - not debating the technicalities in parliament, but what is actually happening in the real world and the very difficult situation people suffer because the onset of this disease can often occur 10 to 20 years after exposure. It is a really difficult situation. People have actually been exposed to this; this is like a time bomb sitting inside them. It is actually going on and they are getting on with their lives. Many people, 10 to 20 years on - their families have grown if they have children or grandchildren, and there is a whole family structure that is growing around them, evolving around them and all the time this thing is ticking away inside them. Then, 10 to 20 years later, when the extended family is large, where people are in a mortgage situation and a whole raft of things, their whole lives are brought down. Their family's lives are brought down by the devastating news that they have been exposed to these dust borne diseases.

The compounding aspect of it is that not only are these people having their lives suddenly thrown into disarray because they have been diagnosed with a lung disease, a dust borne disease, but they are also in a situation where it happens very quickly.

The onset period is very rapid. Families are just coming to grips with the fact that their loved ones are suffering the disease, but they are suddenly going down hill very quickly and having to change whole lifestyles. It is a double whammy. You get hit 10 to 20 years after contracting these diseases. You have just come to grips with that and then suddenly you find out that your own life expectancy is shortened, and your family finds out that your life expectancy is shortened. I just cannot imagine how people cope with it but they do.

The fact that a government is prepared to recognise this, and governments throughout Australia are prepared to recognise this, I consider

a hallmark of the civilised society we live in, and that we have to address these issues.

The sad aspect is that the corporate world somehow has to come to grips with that because they are answerable to shareholders, and that is a very dispassionate and sometimes uncompromising way to look at things.

The rapid onset of the symptoms seems to have put the claimants in that difficult position of requiring a quick resolution to their claims. If you have a situation where a company which is not really compassionate - I do not want to play on James Hardie because the atrocious way they have handled things is pretty well recorded. However, it is that style of corporate approach where the case is handled by extending the litigation period beyond the period of the life expectancy of the claimant. That is pretty crass when you think about that. The claim is extended beyond the period of death therefore the claimant's family do not have access to the normal level of claims. Consequently, from a corporate view point, the claim costs and the legal costs are a tax deduction so that is a lessening of the costs to them. However, the family has to wear their legal costs and they do not have recourse to get adequate compensation for that.

So here we have the situation where the corporate world is using the tax concessions to take advantage of it so it lessens its financial burden. They could argue that away by saying that is a far enough cop because we are looking after our shareholders. I would have thought that companies are more than just shareholders. They are employers, or they are selling a product to world and they are responsible to their customers. It is very easy when you are in a corporate world to remove yourself one step from the actual emotional side of it, but the truth is that the emotional side is there, and that is what governments have to deal with and that is what we are dealing with today.

The problem is that these people, after caring for their loved one and all the costs associated with that, only receive low-level compensation. Then you have the high legal costs of having to defend the case. On top of that is the family has to deal with the grief, a double-edged grief: they have to deal with watching the corporate world basically do them over, which is pretty insidious in many respects. Having a bill like this is important in respect of that.

Under the current system, should a person die before their claim is determined, the damages recoverable by the family do not include such things as pain and suffering, bodily or mental harm, or the curtailment of expectation of life. That all comes under the legal term of 'general

damages'. It is worth pointing them out individually. Legalistic terms do not really bring to the fore the emotion that surrounds this whole situation. By addressing the issue of that, and then defining the period that after the death that these things are actually claimable by the family puts the onus back on the corporate world to say: 'Okay, it is no use us going down that line and extending the case. That is a pointless exercise because we are still going to get hit up with the settlement in any case'.

It is sad in a way that the legal system and parliaments have to make these things happen. Without a direction to a company, we cannot do that. Currently, we see a situation where that company's avenue to mitigate or limit their financial burden is reduced, but we have taken that option away. They are going to have to continue those legal costs and still have to compensate the family.

The other aspect of the bill is the usual time limitations. Under common law, the period is three years for claims to be made, and if we are talking about periods of 10 to 20 years, the problem is that they go beyond the normal period of tort. To make the position very clear, this government has removed any limitation periods for dust disease-related claims.

By combining those two aspects of allowing the claims to occur after death - compensation claims by the family and the general damages area going on beyond death - and removing the restriction on when a claim can be made, the emphasis is put onto the humane world that we have to deal with. We should be applauding ourselves as a parliament because we have looked at the whole area and taken the humanistic approach to correct a wrong in the system.

When you are looking at these areas, it is important not to do this in isolation. New South Wales has very much taken the lead in this area, but it has been important that other jurisdictions, ours included, have been communicating. That is what good government is about, communicating with other jurisdictions and trying to ensure that we can cover it across the board so there are no loopholes whereby companies can say: 'Okay, the claim is in that state. We are over here and we will try to hold it in this state'.

If we are all working together on this, as we have done in the drafting of our bill in line with other jurisdictions, it takes that recourse away. Companies are going to look for loopholes. Let's not kid ourselves and think that they won't. They are answerable to shareholders, so that is their responsibility. It is very cold and callous, but it is their responsibility to ensure that they mitigate costs to their shareholders. So they are going to

look for loopholes, but we have gone a long way to ensuring those cross-jurisdictional outs have been removed.

As I come to the end of my speech, I want to talk about the emotional side of things rather than the legalistic side. As a Labor government, we always have to be conscious of the workers. I commend the Martin Labor government. I commend the other jurisdictions, all Labor jurisdictions, because that is what it is about. Workers are a very important part of our society. This is not just about workers, but workers are probably most prone to being victims of dust borne diseases because they are working in those types of environments. In the past, they have worked in pretty insidious situations. It is important that the Labor party states and territories get together to ensure workers and their families are protected from some things that happened, even years ago, that directly result, in some cases, in death or at least a very debilitating situation.

All other people who come in contact with these dust-borne diseases are going to be protected by this bill, and that is important too. Some people live in families with young kids. They might have played in a playground or all sorts of things. My generation grew up not being aware of all these things. The sad thing is that the corporate world, in many cases, did understand the situation that was happening out there, because they had access to all the laboratories, and that is the sad thing. The corporate world often knew well before us. Smoking is a classic example where the corporate world knew about things before the general public. They have access to big dollars so the corporate world will often cover up things.

It is a good win for humanity. It is good win for the workers and their families. It is a good win for families in general. It is a good win for parliament in general, and for the Martin Labor government too, to pick up the banner on this. The minister should be fully commended because his department is on the ball. They have been working very hard with other jurisdictions, and it is absolutely important that we work together to come up with a situation which, hopefully, will allow families – it is not going to ease their pain, but it will certainly allow them, under very trying circumstances, to ensure that the claimants, the victims in this situation, get some benefit and have some quality of life before the onset of death, in most cases. Even those who have to live with this disease for a long time can actually have some quality of life, but, most importantly, that the families are not left in a stressful situation after their loved ones have passed on because of their situation.

This is a very important bill. I am sure that all members feel the same way as I do about this. I know it is not a political thing, it is across the board. We are all family people, we all understand what it is like. I mean, how do you say what it is like to be in that situation, but all of us have had to deal with death in our families at different times. It is important that we know that governments are actually trying to help us. It is a symbolic thing as well.

Madam Speaker, I commend the minister for his brave and courageous bill, and on behalf of all Territorians thank him and thank the government for bringing forward this most important bill.

Mr BURKE (Brennan): Madam Speaker, I support this bill and commend its introduction. I concur with my colleague, the member for Goyder, that this is important legislation, even if it is not voluminous. This act could well be called the Law Reform (Bernie Banton) Amendment Bill. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned the Hardies experience. I am going to focus some of my comments on Bernie Banton, who was the public face of the action against Hardies. I believe I am correct in saying that the action was run in his name, despite having actually settled his claim in 2000. He pushed for other victims of asbestosis and mesothelioma to be recognised and it was a long struggle.

Bernie Banton AM is a hero of mine. I believe he epitomises all those character traits that are good and that Australians identify with. He is certainly courageous. He fought for many years, putting his fight for justice in front of family, in front of his personal financial situation and, as I said, he had already concluded his own personal claim, so the fight against Hardies really was about other people and not himself.

Members may recall that Bernie and his wife, Karen, who would also have to be recognised for she went through the same things that Bernie did, as did their son, Dean, in dealing with the cost. It is worth remembering that Bernie worked at Hardies for six years in the late 1960s, early 1970s. He was also a union official but that is neither here nor there. The area he worked in, and the colleagues he worked with, were called the snow men. They were called the snow men because, when they appeared, they were covered head to toe in white powder from the kaylite process. In the interview with Andrew Denton, he was asked: of the 137 people he worked with how many were still alive? The answer was nine. All the rest had died and most, if not all, were related to asbestos-related conditions.

The member for Goyder is quite correct when he made reference to the law not being emotional. He may have said something about compassion.

It is very true that emotion is something which those defending claims attempt to keep well out of it because, if you get away from the mere facts and figures, you start to see the greater picture. Of course, people's sympathies start to be evoked when you hear stories of what people go through.

I will say there is nothing wrong whatsoever with any person or company involved in litigation taking legal advice on how to run their claim or their defence. Of course, one of the things that corporations and insurance companies are interested in is minimisation of any claim against them. It is a legitimate concern. However, there is a downside of that because, in terms of mesothelioma, from the time of diagnosis a sufferer has approximately 153 days life expectancy. Therefore, what claim minimisation and going through the full legal avenues and fully utilising your legal mechanism, can and does mean that you are, essentially, trying to run out the legal process until someone dies so they cannot pursue their claim.

Legally, there is nothing wrong with constructing your defence the best possible way you can and, legitimately, pursuing avenues for further information and that sort of thing. However, there does have to be some cost behind that. This bill, in a sense, protects insurers and employers as well, because it says, yes, you can continue to do that, but it protects the victim. It says to the victim and the victim's family: your claim will not fail simply because the wheels of justice have not moved quickly enough for you.

Mesothelioma is a virulent cancer. As I said, 153 days is the average life expectancy for someone suffering asbestosis. It is still, in the words of Bernie Banton, a life sentence but you have a lot longer to suffer before you die. Anywhere from 15 to 20 years is the life span with asbestosis. Bernie Banton also has Asbestos-Related Pleural Disease but still manages to describe himself as one of the lucky ones because he could still get out there and fight. And it was a fight. It was a long fight. It was reassuring to hear the Leader of the Opposition refer to the behaviour of Hardies as 'reprehensible'. That is certainly a word I would use in relation to that. They fought every step of the way until finally they had nowhere else to go and, even then, it took a year between the agreement and signing off the agreement.

It is interesting that Bernie described himself as one of the lucky ones, because mesothelioma is an excruciating disease. Asbestosis is not a great deal better. Bernie was asked about mesothelioma to which he replied: 'You would not wish it on a Hardies executive'. Coming from someone who had Hardies executives laugh at him when he suggested that Hardies fund a pool,

it is a telling thing to say that you would not wish mesothelioma on a Hardies executive.

Despite where we ended up, and I am thankful that we did end up where we did, and Hardies did agree to create a fund, and I think their commitment is 35% of profits for the next 40 years – and that is something to be applauded. However, let us not forget the great hype that it has taken to get to that point. There were mass rallies in centres and international union action against Hardies. I do not think many people realise that the union-sponsored action was international. There were rallies in Europe and in America. There were black bans on Hardies products. On occasions, Hardies executives laughed at Bernie and the plight of the many sufferers that their products had caused. One thing that Bernie did say was that he could not forgive Hardies for continuing to use asbestos products and producing them for use right up until about 1987, notwithstanding they knew the dangers.

Asbestos products are fine as long as they are contained and there are not free fibres. Members will remember when the Darwin Hotel was demolished there were special processes that had to be put in place to protect the demolition workers, and to ensure that no asbestos was accidentally released from the site during the demolition. We should remember that asbestos is still contained in many buildings, many houses in the suburbs. A number of rooves in the northern suburbs are asbestos.

It is not just about people who have worked in asbestos industries; it is also about their families. There are partners of men who have worked in the asbestos industry who have also contracted these diseases because when they were washing the clothes and hanging them out they were exposed to fibres. Children have been exposed to fibres. Crushed asbestos was used for driveways because of its hard-wearing properties so kids have played amongst asbestos. There are people who are now in their 30s who are dying from asbestos-related diseases, not having ever worked in the industry but having come into contact with asbestos. It is also important for home renovators to be aware of the dangers asbestos poses and to be aware of what it looks like in its various forms. It does not take much exposure for you to be at risk. They are not pleasant diseases, mesothelioma or asbestosis.

Madam Speaker, we cannot legislate corporate responsibility, but we can make it easier for people with these diseases to fully prosecute their cases before the courts and to ensure that their vulnerabilities are not taken advantage of. That is what this dust diseases amendment bill seeks to do. It will have that effect. Essentially, the

campaign was an ACTU-sponsored campaign of which Bernie Banton was the face. This country has much to thank Bernie Banton for. It is worth noting part of the campaign was union action and rallies and an individual can be fined \$33 000 for attending one of these rallies under the present WorkChoices regime. It is worth remembering that little point and the imbalance which WorkChoices currently brings.

I commend this bill to the Assembly. To Bernie, Karen and Dean Banton, I say a sincere thank you for having the courage, the tenacity, not being ground down, for sacrificing so much for the many sufferers with these diseases around the country. Let us hope that there are more people like Bernie and his family having the courage to pursue the many issues and to pursue those who bear some culpability for actions. I can only hope that if ever there is a time when I need to pursue something, I pursue it with the same courage and vigour as the Banton family. I commend this bill to the House.

Mr BONSON (Millner): Madam Speaker, I wish to contribute to the Law Reform (Dust Diseases) Amendment Bill 2007. I have been moved by the contributions of all members of this House. It is not often that we get to introduce legislation that really is going to have a positive effect on people's lives.

As many of the members have outlined, this is about helping the victims of serious health issues, caused by a number of different work environments, to follow claims once they have passed on, not obviously for the benefit of themselves, but for the benefit of their families. This is a fantastic initiative.

I would like to restate the purpose of this bill. The minister has already said that the purpose of this bill is to amend the *Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act* so as to add damages for pain and suffering, mental and bodily harm, and curtailment of expectation of life, better described as general damages, to survive the death of a claimant of a dust disease-related claim if the claim is on foot at the time of the deceased's death. This bill will also amend the *Limitation Act*, which governs the period within which claims must be made in the Northern Territory.

As we know, in these claims, the effect on the family and the individual is quite horrendous. The suffering they go through causes deep distress, not only to themselves but to those people around them. I believe every member in this House understands that we need to assist the most vulnerable in our community, particularly when their damages or injuries are caused by no fault of their own. Often, we have to make hard decisions in this House that affect many different people,

and not always in the most positive way. Today, we will pass a bill that will affect those in most need, those that are most vulnerable in our communities, in the most positive way that we can in the circumstances that affect them.

I welcome the Leader of the Opposition's contribution. I note that when we do things like this that we get very much a muffled approval by the opposition, but often we do not see the same type of enthusiasm for bills like this, and real genuine applause for this government's positive action. The Attorney-General works tirelessly on many different aspects in his role. We saw taxation today; we will see law and order issues over the next weeks and months.

Today, we see a bill defending the most vulnerable of all our citizens, and this is the type of portfolio the Attorney-General has. I am sure, deep down and at night when he is thinking about all the difficult challenges that he has to face in terms of laws being passed through this House, that these are the moments that he really looks forward to – the ability to put into effect what government can do for individuals.

We heard the member for Brennan talk about workers, and the efforts that the unions have put into getting this type of legislation. If not for the individuals the member for Brennan named and unsung heroes who work behind the scenes, who lobby governments and make these issues public interest issues, we would never see these matters dealt with, controversial in their nature but, in reality, quite fair, in the community, as the minister said, where this suffering has gone on for many years.

These contracted dust diseases cause illnesses that we are coming to terms with as a general community. He also talked about the fact that the diagnosis of dust-related diseases can come 10 to 20 years after exposure. Sadly, it often results in death soon after diagnosis. Therefore, by allowing the best medical attention that we can get to these individuals while they are still alive, but also their families, their children, their grandchildren, their spouses, those people who count on these people, to have some type of opportunity to get compensation for their loss, is a magnificent initiative.

The member for Goyder's contribution was heartfelt. He used the word 'compassion'. As I have said many times in this House, governments have to make tough choices. When we get legislation like this which really shows the compassion that the government members have for the job that they do for the most the vulnerable human beings in our society, we have to walk out of here and feel taller and better for the work that we do. I welcome his heartfelt contribution.

The final matter that I would like to note on behalf of all the members was that the Law Society has advised that it considers the amendments are wholly desirable and in line with other jurisdictions. They went on to congratulate this government and the Attorney-General on the proposed changes for the benefit of dust disease victims, which we see implemented today. We have a recognised body that represents not only defence solicitors, but also prosecutors and litigators, also thanking this government for their efforts to make it more workable for those victims who are in most need.

Madam Speaker, I thank all the members of this House for getting behind and supporting the Attorney-General through these difficult times that we are in, so we remember that this is what it is all about. It is about us making genuine change for the most vulnerable human beings who live in our society. This is why the majority of us are in this House. I commend the bill.

Mr STIRLING (Justice and Attorney-General): Madam Speaker, I thank the Leader of the Opposition for her comments and support of the bill, and the members for Goyder, Brennan and Millner for their contributions in support of the bill, and the insight that they brought as individual members with their own perspective to the need for this legislation.

Many families, of course, have been affected by these types of diseases. They are about as insidious as you get because, not only is there such a long lead time before the onset of the illness and the diagnosis, the resolution of that disease – terminal – is very quick, having virtually sat dormant for so many years.

My brother joined VicRail as a car and wagon builder apprentice in the late 1950s, early 1960s, and worked at Newport Jolimont workshops in Melbourne for many years, boarding at Williamstown. He eventually relocated to the Bendigo workshops where he settled, married and had a family. Unbeknownst to him, his partner contracted the disease. As the member for Brennan pointed out, it is not always the worker, it can be the spouse. In this case, whilst my brother is fitter than I am today at some 10 years older than me, his wife was in the habit of shaking out his overalls before they went into the washing machine - overalls that were full of asbestos dust. Whilst he worked in it without masks, drilled it, cut it, ripped it out, maintained it, repaired it in VicRails car and wagons, and to this day is unaffected, the act of shaking the dust out of the overalls led to his wife contracting one of these very diseases, and she was gone well within a year from the diagnosis of the illness. The case was settled out of court, but you cannot bring back

a life, and monetary compensation will never replace the loss of my sister-in-law, Betty.

So, there is a personal element to this bill, and there are many families who have come up against this; many personnel on naval ships, particularly older ones, where asbestos was used almost exclusively as lagging on the pipes throughout the ships. Ships by their nature are very confined areas in terms of living and sleeping arrangements. Sailors were required to sleep on bunks most often within inches of the ceiling above them and those ceilings always have pipes running backwards and forwards. Ships in heavy seas shake and roll and shudder to a tremendous degree which leads to flakes of asbestos and dust coming off the lagging on those pipes to be absorbed by the sailors sleeping beneath. It is quite common for many of our former naval people to contract illnesses of this nature.

It is a bizarre illness in that sense that only a percentage of all those workers who worked at Wittenoom in the Blue Sky Mine contracted the disease. My brother lived in it, ate it, breathed it all his working life and to this day is fit and healthy. His spouse indirectly contracted the disease through shaking out those overalls.

There is a simple purpose, Madam Speaker, to the bill: to assist those who suffer from these types of diseases and their families. It will ease the victim's financial burden by maintaining their right to claim compensation and, most importantly, to speed up the passage of their cases through the system. It recognises the reality of dust disease by providing amendments to address the unique difficulties faced by sufferers and their families in seeking damages for those injuries.

Government also considers that it will speed up claims so that they can be finalised while the plaintiff is still alive. Dust-related disease claimants and their heirs will be treated differently by the legal system as a result of the bill. The community is well aware of the suffering faced by those who have contracted dust-related illnesses, and diagnosis of dust-related diseases often comes 10 to 20 years after initial exposure. Despite that long period of gestation between exposure and diagnosis, it is often the case that death follows quite soon after diagnosis.

That puts dust disease claimants in a very difficult position. It requires the speediest resolution of their legal claims to protect their legal entitlements. We have seen too regularly it is often not possible. As a result, claimant's families usually already have carried the burden of primary care and then only receive quite low level compensation payments while facing very high legal costs if the claimant dies prior to the termination of the claim.

Two key features will address these difficulties. First, the bill will allow general damages to be determined even after the plaintiff dies; a different result than for plaintiffs in other actions. It is done by amending section 6 of the *Law Reform (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act*, so that if a person commences an action for damages for personal injury arising from a dust disease but dies before the action is determined, general damages for pain and suffering, bodily or mental harm, or curtailment of expectation of life can still be awarded by the court. Second, the bill removes any limitation period for dust disease-related claims and it does that by amending section 12 of the *Limitation Act* to provide that no limitation period applies to an action for damages for personal injury arising from a dust disease. Similar amendments have been made in other jurisdictions so it will achieve consistency with other states for dust-related claims.

The current scheme in the Territory as it relates to dust disease litigation reflects usual tort claims. Whilst the claims survive death, damages for the pain and suffering of that person or for any bodily and mental harm suffered by them, or curtailment of their expectation of life - that is, general damages - do not. In other words, if the claimant dies, his/her estate may recover disbursements, funeral expenses and damages for loss of earnings, but not general damages. As I have noted, dust disease often involves rapid onset of symptoms and rapid death. An unfortunate consequence of the fact is that defendants in dust disease matters have been alleged to deliberately delay proceedings so the case is not resolved before the claimant dies thereby reducing their liability under the current regime. As I previously indicated, this diagnosis can often only be made 10 to 20 years after the initial exposure.

Under the current law, the usual limitation period for common law claims in tort is three years unless, pursuant to section 44 of the *Limitation Act*, a fact material to the case is discovered after the limitation period has expired. In such cases, an extension of time can be sought. Despite the fact that this avenue to overcome the limitation period does exist, the argument as to whether a claim warrants an extension of time can be lengthy, costly and exhaustive. The argument may use much of the short and valuable time available to a dust disease sufferer and that it is unfortunate, both in personal terms and in terms of the chances of seeing a resolution to their case before their death.

As I said, the bill substantially alters the current position in respect to dust disease-related claims and overcomes the problems I have outlined. To recap, it does this by, first, bestowing a right upon death of the original claimant to continue to pursue

general damages provided a claim is already on foot, and second, by removing any limitation period in dust-related diseases claims. These rights and exceptions are not currently enjoyed by any personal injury claimants in the Northern Territory and nor will they be generally available under this amendment. This and other governments around Australia recognise that dust diseases are a special case deserving of specific legislative exemption.

The amendments will, importantly, bring Territory legislation into line with New South Wales as well as other states where a specialist tribunal, the Dust Diseases Tribunal, handles most dust diseases claims regardless of the jurisdiction in which exposure first occurred. This amendment and the uniformity it brings will prevent forum shopping and unnecessary disputes about the law to be applied if and when cases that relate to the Territory come before the New South Wales tribunal. The necessity of this amendment was first brought to the government's attention by the legal representative of a dust disease claimant. Following close examination of other jurisdictions' move to uniform legislation, the public interest in allowing the amendment became overwhelming.

The bill has been brought to the attention of the Law Society of the Northern Territory, the Territory Insurance Office and the Insurance Council of Australia. The Law Society has advised that it considers the amendments are highly desirable and in line with other jurisdictions. It went on to congratulate the government on the proposed changes to the benefit of dust disease victims. I thank the Law Society for their comments. The Insurance Council of Australia advises that at this stage, they do not have any comment to make on the bill, and there has been no comment from the Territory Insurance Office.

It is necessary to comment on the retrospective effect of the bill. The usual policy position regarding amendments to legislation is to avoid retrospectivity. As a general rule, amendments should only apply from the date of commencement. This bill does, however, provide for retrospectivity insofar as it will allow the amendment relating to general damages to apply to an action that is already on foot, even though the person had already died at the date of commencement of this bill.

That is, where a person commenced an action for damages for personal injuries arising from a dust disease and that claim remains undetermined as at the commencement of this amendment, a claim for general damages can continue, even in cases where the person has passed away. Similar amendments made in New South Wales and South Australia were also retrospective for proceedings already commenced.

The model we have used, we think, is the best way of giving certainty to plaintiffs and their families, of minimising delays, and assisting in finalising matters as soon as possible. The amendments represent a significant advance for dust disease sufferers and are a great enhancement to the rights of those workers and their families.

Motion agreed to; bill read a second time.

Mr STIRLING (Justice and Attorney-General) (by leave): Madam Speaker, before I move the third reading, I extend my thanks to Jenny Daniel-Yee from the Department of Justice for her work on this legislation. My thanks to Lisa Coffey from my staff for her guidance on this legislation.

Madam Speaker, I move that the bill be now read a third time.

Motion agreed to; bill read a third time.

MOTION
Note Statement – Primary Industry
Market Indicator

Continued from 9 October.

Mr KNIGHT (Daly): Madam Speaker, I support the Minister for Primary Industry and Fisheries' statement on the Primary Industry Market Indicator initiative. I congratulate the minister on his settling into this portfolio. There are many parts of my electorate that fall into the pastoral, horticultural and agricultural areas, and it has been delightful to see the new minister travel extensively and interact with industry groups. I know from feedback I have received that he is getting high respect for his advocacy for those groups. Pastoralists appreciate the visits and the attentive ear of the minister. I look forward to seeing him around the traps in future.

The agricultural industry is highly significant for the Northern Territory. We have a number of industries that come and go. We have a resources boom at the moment, but the perennial industries, such as the pastoral and horticultural industries, keep ticking over and it is a requirement of this government to ensure those industries are well resourced and we are able to help them expand.

The agriculture industry has been troubled since European settlement in the Northern Territory, with various enterprises started and finished for a whole range of reasons, from the economy to the climate and poor management and personnel. The industry is growing and makes up a huge part of our economy.

In the plant industry area, the Darwin region contributes over \$100m a year to the NT economy. The Douglas-Daly region, in my electorate, contributes \$11.8m, which is a very significant amount for a small, discrete area. The Katherine region contributes \$40m annually, which feeds into the township. That sort of money tends to jolt around the town and support various businesses. It is a significant part of our economy.

In the NT fruit industry, the mango sector contributes over \$53m a year. Lesser known is the melon industry which contributes \$25m, and that is a large part of the growing regime of the Coomalie and Douglas-Daly regions.

In the vegetable industry, and I do not think many people would be familiar with these sorts of figures, \$13.3m for cucumbers, and much of that would come from the market gardens in the rural area, and okra is certainly growing - \$3m, and bitter melon, around \$4m. So there is a whole range of vegetables being grown.

A big part of the industry with the changing dynamics of the pastoral industry is the hay and the silage industry – it is an industry which has sought to export much more with, I believe, a trial shipment to Korea to see how things went over there. \$17m is coming from the hay and silage areas, which is significant.

Another growing part of the agricultural area is the forestry industry. In 2006, 500 ha of hardwood product was planted, and 10 000 ha of the hardwood was pulped.

In the agricultural, pastoral and horticultural areas things are moving, which is a good result. We cannot rest on our laurels. We are a very small jurisdiction in the scheme of things, 200 000 people, so as a province we are very small locally; regionally, within the country, 20 million is not a great number from which to sell into. Our real market for our crops is overseas. You just look around the region – 200-odd million people in Indonesia, 1.1 billion people in India, and over 1 billion people in China. So the Asia Pacific area is a huge market for us.

This initiative came from listening to what people wanted. As the minister alluded to, the Northern Territory Economic Development Framework spelled out that several areas needed to be looked at. The regional growth and investment into the Territory, the development of the workforce, improvement of productivity, and also environmental sustainability were the key topics. That regional growth, and getting development into the agricultural and pastoral areas, is the way of the future of ensuring that that industry is sustainable; it really cannot survive on its own. Looking back to the history of the

Northern Territory, we have had great problems of being so far away from markets. In the past, our market was very internal. When the Duracks moved into the Kimberleys, they had vast cattle empires, but they had a great deal of difficulty making any money because they were so far from the market they perceived they had to sell into. That is a sign of somewhat a narrow-minded mindset of where your market is. Our market is into Asia. That is where the population is, that is where the growth is, and that is where we have to target our expanding growth in those primary industry sectors into that new market.

There is also a need for diversity. Growers are always looking for opportunities, and it is providing assistance to them to see where they can target their products. This program is also identifying the advantages we have. We have a stable economy, a stable government, and ample water supplies in the Top End and through the Katherine region. Even in the Ti Tree area we have very reliable water sources when they are managed successfully. We have those advantages. We also have a very good workforce to look at these different industries. We have all those advantages.

PIMI has been described to us before. It is an excellent tool. If you go on to the website and look at it, it is a bit hard to describe. However, the colour coding identifies straight up where the opportunities are. You have quite a number of areas on the matrix of the website, which shows that there are many countries which are not using the products we have in the Northern Territory. Certain countries are picking them up and, in many other countries, the market is either unknown or no-one has explored those opportunities. Very visually, very quickly, you can look at a particular product - whether it is dragon fruit, jackfruit or buffalo meat - and you can see across that target area of both overseas and interstate, where investigation needs to happen. For the average grower or primary producer, it will be a very useful tool. It will be a greater tool for them to advocate to their representative bodies and to the minister, where they would like further investigation to happen.

The information, lobbying and foresight from the primary producers will see a great deal of input into the construction of test crops for programs through our research farms. The research farms across the Territory have been quite successful. This tool will allow them to get more feedback from the growers and other primary producers about where they would like to see it go. If it becomes quite obvious with a particular product that there is a great opportunity, but they have little knowledge of how it applies to growing or running a certain herd in the Northern Territory, those research farms can certainly assist in that.

PIMI is a tool that growers need to use in conjunction with other tools. As with the advent of better communication technology with computers, they make greater use of weather reports on how they determine their seeding or where they run their cattle, or take cattle out or muster. With the better communication and better information through weather reports, they change their operations. PIMI will do the same thing; it will give them more of a worldly view of what is available to them. They can look into the back yards of overseas markets from their living room to see what is available. I know the different regional industry representative bodies get together and they talk. They will use this website and that will generate a great deal of discussion about getting together and putting in a different crop, getting involved in trade missions overseas, talking to the minister when he visits about a certain product or, when they have field days at the research farms, talking to the staff about opportunities that exist.

The current data we have is quite extensive and the minister has described those. In your crops, forestry and horticulture there are quite a lot of products we would know, and it gives a very good description of a snapshot of what those areas actually mean through the legend. It describes the good existing market demand with potential increased supply; other identification is that there is good existing market demand with minimal increased supply. It also tells you where not to go if there are prohibited areas, or if there are quarantine restrictions, it tells people up-front what they should or should not do.

I believe PIMI will be pivotal tool or initiative for the industry and it will also expand into other sectors, and they have been described. You have a whole different group of industry starting up. You have the overseas education programs starting up – it is a huge industry in Australia – 40 000 Indian students come to Australia each year. It is a huge market. If you are in that industry, if you had a program like this whereby you could bring it up to see what the potential is in various countries you could target your promotions into that area. In other sectors, too, this will be a very valuable tool to make it all work.

I acknowledge the comments of the minister that it is a work in progress; that it is developing. It is very useful at the moment. It will certainly improve. The information is good. It has referrals to product descriptions and as the data we get annually improves it will certainly help those people out bush. I hope we get improved telecommunications infrastructure and facilities out bush because more and more people on pastoral properties and on horticultural properties are using the technology and this is assisting them. This is shaping the government's assistance within this industry to meet the technology that they will be

using. It certainly is something we can lead from in the Northern Territory. This is where the food bowl of Australia will be in the future, in certain areas – it is not going to be for all of them, but the Northern Territory has a competitive advantage because of our location.

I congratulate the minister on this initiative. It shows that the minister has settled into this portfolio. I know you enjoy it. It is great work to be involved in the pastoral sector and primary industries sector. There is a great deal of potential in the Northern Territory. It is our job as parliamentarians and within the government to assist wherever we can in promoting the industry and developing the industry into the future. Congratulations, minister.

Mr HAMPTON (Stuart): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the minister on bringing forward this statement on the Primary Industry Market Indicator, and also acknowledge all the other speakers' contributions on this subject. As the minister said, it has been work in progress over the last two years. I congratulate his Department of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines on the fantastic work they have done over those two years in putting together this database.

We heard the minister describe how this indicator database came about, acknowledging the Economic Development Summit held in 2005 and the need for this database being driven from that summit, particularly in the areas of regional growth and investment in the Territory, including the development of our workforce, improvements in productivity, and environmental sustainability.

The five key objectives from that summit were the drivers for the minister and his department to establish this Primary Industry Market Indicator. I acknowledge the important part that many people involved in that summit played. The objectives coming from that summit were important in the development of this database.

As we have heard all speakers say, primary industry, particularly the horticulture industry in the Northern Territory, is of growing importance to the Northern Territory economy and also the global economy. That demonstrates the important role this database will play in driving primary industries and horticulture as a significant player in our industry and economy, especially for the global economy in terms of the Northern Territory providing a bigger share in exporting our produce, our primary industries, and our cattle overseas. This database is going to play a key role in being able to improve and increase our exports to other countries, particularly those of our neighbours in the Asian region and Indonesia.

We have heard speakers say that industry sectors such as horticulture, pastoralism and fishing have grown. For example, horticulture has grown from a \$96m industry in 2005 to \$145m industry in 2006. That is significant growth and you can see why this database is going to be an important asset for the Northern Territory to grow even further.

The Territory cattle industry's contribution to the Northern Territory gross state product in 2006 was estimated at \$180m. That is another significant contributor to our economy, together with tourism, which we debated last week. Horticulture and the Territory's cattle industry are creeping up on tourism as significant economic contributors to the Territory.

I have had a look at the PIMI a couple of times now. I found the database very user friendly. The colour coded matrix and information about particular types of plants and crops is very easy to access and understand. It is a very user friendly information database and provides good information on breeds of cattle and buffalo.

PIMI has a variety of other uses such as supporting and informing government and agency decisions with regard to the provision of regional development being extended and underpinning agency promotional and marketing opportunities into the future. The index also provides a credible component of trade mission support. We recently heard about the Chief Minister's trade mission to Vietnam, and that is information you can source through the database on our neighbours, whether it be Vietnam, Indonesia or any of the other Asian countries, which is very useful for producers and developers. Also, forming part of the case developed to attract investment into the Territory's primary industries and ensuring decisions made across various departments in relation to exports, have the potential to be coordinated and focused. They are the other very important uses of the Primary Industries Market Indicator.

In my electorate of Stuart, it has a lot of use, with the pastoral and the cattle industry being significant industries. You only have to look at the growing centre of Central Australia in Ti Tree, in the Anmatjere region, with the table grapes in particular at the Ti Tree farms and Territory Grapes. This index database can provide many great opportunities for them to market their produce, both in Australia and overseas. We also have the economic development committees, the Anmatjere Development Committee and, once again, this indicator can support those types of committees in driving directions that they want to see or focus on into the future. More importantly, the increased exports, whether it be interstate or overseas, creates more jobs, which are vitally important for the Anmatjere people around the

Ti Tree region. The indicator can provide and create opportunities in local employment.

There are challenges though, particularly for people in remote areas. The challenge for the index indicator, as my colleague, the member for Daly, has indicated, is technology, particularly in remote areas - the availability of Internet access for pastoral properties, for remote communities, there are many issues with Broadband and the speed of technology out there. To access this database we need to look at the issues confronting bush people, communities and pastoralists in having good access to Internet and Broadband. That is a big challenge. We need to ensure that technology is improved, the speed of Internet access out there becoming even faster, so it is not an inhibitor, it is an asset for our communities and pastoralists.

The market indicator focuses on domestic and international markets. If you get on to the website, you see that it has all the states within Australia, the domestic markets as well as the overseas markets. With the table grapes it identifies where there is current or good existing market demand potential for table grapes and opportunities to increase supply. The indicator also identifies good existing market demand with minimal or nil potential to increase supply, or even those that are prohibited for various reasons, or quarantine restrictions apply. The indicator gives out a lot of information; it is beneficial to both industry and to people who want to get into table grapes, or into buffalo meat, or other areas.

A few speakers have mentioned the research implications throughout the Territory. In my region in Alice Springs, we have the Alice Springs CSIRO. Much of the research they do is research on crops and feed for cattle. At Kidman Springs and Pigeon Hole, you would have heard about the Pigeon Hole Field Day and research into grazing for pastoralists. There is the research farm at Ti Tree as well, doing a lot of research into various crops. I believe they even have asparagus at Ti Tree and many citrus fruit.

The market indicator is a great tool in linking research to real economic outcomes and opportunities, whether it is exporting or importing. The outcome and result is, obviously, jobs. So it is an important linkage that needs to be acknowledged between research and the final product being sold overseas or interstate.

One comparison is the mining industry. Particularly in my electorate with the Tanami mining province, it is a significant industry, and also a big area for jobs. Similarly, it is looking at sustainability of the mining industry. The minister talked about potential opportunities to broaden the information and the database of the primary

industry's indicator. There is probably potential in the mining sector as well, for which the minister is also responsible, regarding the environment, rehabilitation of mine sites, and sustainability of jobs. That is just one comparison I would like to put on the public record.

In Central Australia, with the Desert Knowledge project, there are many opportunities, and I can also see broadening the information that this database provides.

I congratulate the minister and this government in its approach to keeping the economy strong, keeping investors' or developers' interests high in the Northern Territory. As we all know, the result of greater interest from developers - whether it be in the horticultural or primary industries area - is more jobs, more jobs for locals, and training opportunities. The Primary Industry Market Indicator is a critical tool in providing our government with these opportunities and with us leading the way in this country. It is a competitive environment we live in. Even though we are all Australians, we have to compete against other states to get more development happening. We have plenty of available land, and indigenous people who are prepared to work with us in developing these opportunities. The database is a critical tool for us to work together and provide these opportunities. It is also a critical tool to ensure that the primary industries and pastoral sectors continue to grow and keep pace with the mining resource development sector and tourism.

I congratulate the minister on the work in progress. There is no doubt that it is a challenging portfolio. I know he has been to my electorate on quite a few occasions, to the Tanami mines as well as through the Ti Tree region. I look forward to him coming down that way again and seeing some good outcomes. I know we had some success at Mulga Bore. The minister was with me, and I know he was pretty impressed with the sign: 'The home of the Mulga Bore Magpies'. Signing that land use agreement which is going to open up potential horticultural developments in the Ti Tree region was a significant achievement, minister. It is going to create more jobs. This database is going to assist people who want to express an interest in developing further horticultural developments in Ti Tree. Once again, congratulations to you and your staff. I look forward to hearing more about the database.

Mr HENDERSON (Employment, Education and Training): Mr Deputy Speaker, I support the minister for Primary Industry's statement. I suppose it is a bit of a tandem to the minister's statement regarding the database, and supporting growers and pastoralists in identifying markets and the potential prices they might be able to achieve for the crops that they produce, that if we

are going to have an industry that is going to be able to supply markets we have a workforce able to participate in what is a growing industry in the Northern Territory.

As minister, through Jobs Plan 3, we are putting more money into training for Territorians across a whole range of industry sectors than any government before us. We made a commitment, within this term of office, to train 10 000 apprentices and trainees, essentially doubling the training effort across the Northern Territory. Many people said that this could not be done. I am very pleased to advise the House that in a pro rata way we are just ahead of schedule. At the moment, since the last election, just over 6500 people have commenced apprenticeships or traineeships across the Northern Territory.

If you are looking at the opportunities for regional economic development and employment in our regions, and specifically for opportunities for indigenous people to participate in the economy, then it is the primary industry sector in those remote areas which provides, I suppose, the low hanging fruit in terms of the jobs that are available and the jobs that are in a great deal of demand right across the Northern Territory.

It was interesting, following the member for Stuart, talking about what is happening in the Ti Tree region with grape production and other production in that region. As minister for Training, my agency is working with the member for Stuart at a local level with projects that are happening there to target training dollars to support real employment outcomes as opposed to training dollars that get soaked up by training providers. And it is very hard to find the jobs at the end of the day. I look forward to continuing to work with the member for Stuart in and around the Ti Tree region.

There have been a number of projects that have started to kick some goals. One of those is the Indigenous Pastoral Program which has increased indigenous participation in the Northern Territory's pastoral industry. It is a cross-government, multi-agency initiative which provides targeted training to increase indigenous Territorians pastoral skills, and helps indigenous landowners build sustainable pastoral enterprises and increase pastoral productions from their land. Other partners to this are the Northern Land Council in the Northern Territory. That cooperation on the ground to get indigenous people into our pastoral industry is only to be commended.

The major training provider in this sector is Charles Darwin University. DEET provides significant funding to Charles Darwin University for VET training. In 2006, Charles Darwin University

delivered 327 485 hours of training in this sector, up from 315 000 hours last year. It is a strange way to report, but that is the way the federal government and all the intergovernmental agreements require us to report: the number of hours of training that have been funded and delivered. Many of the recipients of this training are indigenous Territorians and Charles Darwin University recorded 6500 indigenous course enrolments in 2005-06. So we are slowly seeing people take up these opportunities that are being provided through this government's funding of Vocational Education and Training across a range of industries, but very specifically in the primary industries and horticultural areas.

The School of Science and Primary Industry at CDU makes a large contribution to training in the primary industry sector. The Katherine Campus is a focus for this activity. As well as studying at the Katherine Campus, students gain hands-on experience in rural studies at Mataranka Station, a 77 000 ha commercial cattle station. The campus focuses on agricultural training for vocational and technical education courses, and Australian apprenticeships and traineeships in agriculture. Programs include the new nationally accredited rural production VTE TAFE training package and expansion of the college's Jackaroo and Jillaroo courses. Two to five day workshops in rural production skill areas such as welding, vehicle maintenance, operating tractors, ride-ons and four-wheel driving are also offered by the Katherine Campus, 16 km north of the Katherine town centre. To have that calibre of training facility and that level of training being provided from our regional centres such as Katherine makes access to training for people much more available and hence enhances their capacity to move into work.

The Charles Darwin University Rural College is part of the Katherine campus and primarily provides training for VTE and delivers technical and further education programs at Certificate, Diploma and Advanced Diploma levels. Training is offered in beef cattle production, general agriculture studies, animal studies, grain production and rural business management, all the time providing valuable practical experience that consolidates the theory. That is really part of the key; to get people, as well as doing the theory, out of the classroom onto the land. That practical experience is going to be the key to keep trainees and apprentices going to complete their classroom studies, courses and finish their exams.

External study and remote training packages and workshops are constantly expanding to include delivery to cover Northern Australia from Broome and Kununurra in the West, and from Townsville to Cape York in Northern Queensland. Training is aimed to create job opportunities as

farm hands, supervisors and managers, office administrators, assistant veterinary nurses, property managers and stock and station agents. These are all career options for students who are successful in rural studies.

CDU also offers customised training to upgrade the skills of current staff to meet immediate demands in the workplace. Training programs are available in machinery operations, skid steer operations, farm chemical safety, mustering, fencing, crocodiles, prawns, chainsaw operation, occupational health and safety, horse shoeing, pregnancy testing for beef cattle, fin fish, water quality, and many other areas. The extensiveness of the training that is available in the Northern Territory does do us proud with a population of 214 000 people.

Employment in the many horticultural fields is becoming increasingly specialised, with a greater emphasis on technology and management skills including contract administration and tendering skills. Some enterprises require employees to be multiskilled across horticulture sectors and, in some instances, agriculture. CDU provides training in horticulture, asset management, arboriculture, landscape, nursery, parks and gardens, production and turf management. The training is designed to create opportunities for employment as arborists, landscape gardeners, nursery assistants, parks and gardens assistants and the turf industry. All of these, when you are talking about developing a rural economy, growing crops for markets that are available in Australia and overseas, the mix of skills and workforce participation that we need in the Northern Territory to be able to supply those markets is extensive, and it is good to see that training organisations are able to deliver the courses required for people to work in these industries to benefit the industries and the economy of the Territory.

There have been some recent celebrations in primary industry training with building skills in the pastoral sector. In 2006, the NT Cattlemen's Association working with Rural Skills Australia identified the need to upskill existing workers in the sector in Certificate III and IV in Agriculture so that they could train newcomers in the industry. DEET provided funding to the training provider for assessment of experienced stockmen in the Victoria River District. At the end of the project, 18 stockmen were assessed with one obtaining a Certificate II, 12 obtaining a Certificate III and five obtaining Certificate IV qualifications. One of the main thrusts of Jobs Plan 3 that was introduced as part of the budget this year is to build partnerships across the Northern Territory for training; partnerships with industry and partnerships with individual enterprises working with communities, whether they be remote or regional communities, looking at the people who are looking for work,

identifying the skills and training people for a job. The Cattlemen's Association working with Rural Skills Australia, my department of DEET and the training provider to upskill 18 stockmen in the Victoria River District is an excellent example.

Earlier this year, another success story was families and local schoolchildren joined the Chief Minister and the member for Arafura to celebrate the success of nine trainees who finished their Certificate III in Forest and Forest Products and now have permanent jobs with Great Southern Plantation on Melville Island. The history of forestry on the Tiwi Islands and the vision of earlier Tiwi leaders for economic and social development is coming to fruition. The nine graduates have full-time jobs on a live-in roster at Maxwell Creek on Melville Island. The second intake of forestry trainees has joined the staff at Maxwell Creek.

It takes me back to a Community Cabinet meeting that we as a government held, probably three years ago now, on the Tiwi Islands where we stayed at Maxwell Creek. We met with many of the workers who were establishing the camp as the forest and the saplings were being sown on Melville Island. In talking to the then management over dinner that night was, what I would have thought, and we can now see, a very genuine commitment from Great Southern Plantations to train local people for real jobs in the forestry industry. Of course, no-one was under any illusions that this was not going to be easy for a whole range of reasons. It was our belief that Great Southern Plantations was serious about that commitment. People from that particular company whom I have met over the last couple of years talk about the slow but steady success they are having. As I keep saying, one of my favourite Australian musicians is Paul Kelly: from little things, big things grow. We are starting to see that these outcomes can be achieved when people work together, and it is good to see. I have the names of those trainees who got those jobs.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I believe all of us in the Northern Territory know the importance of our rural economy. Through this database which the minister outlined in his statement, it is good to see that the department is really focusing on identifying potential markets for Territory produce. We have great challenges to get our produce into the marketplace. Really, if we are going to develop these industries sustainably and into the future, we have to look at the demand and our capacity to meet the markets. It is not a case of sticking something in the ground anymore and seeing if it will grow, and then if we grow it, or if it can grow in the Northern Territory, we are going to produce it in large quantities and then we are going to look where we can sell that particular produce. That is just not the way to do it, and we

have seen spectacular trials over many years in a number of areas where the Territory might be good at producing a particular line of produce, but the economics of getting that produce into the market at a competitive price defeats us time and time again.

I congratulate the minister on the work that he and his department are doing in better understanding the markets for produce across Australia, and working with our rural industry sectors to match that market demand with produce from the Northern Territory. Whilst I am Minister for Employment, Education and Training, we will continue to work with the resources and funding that we have to continue to train and develop people for this growing industry in the Northern Territory. I commend the minister on his statement.

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader):

Mr Deputy Speaker, I will just make a few points and, in so many ways, many points have been made. I join with every other speaker to congratulate the minister, but perhaps more particularly his department. The Primary Industry Market Indicator initiative is a great one. We have all had a look on the website. There is no doubt that it is interesting and useful. To be interesting in so many ways is good, but to be useful is so much better. It looks to be a very good tool, and one that will be of enormous benefit to those who are working in our primary industries.

It is important that those involved learn more about what could be grown or produced in the Territory and how we can pitch what we grow and produce to relevant markets. In this age of globalisation, the people who work in the primary industry sector, probably better than many others, know that they have to compete and get involved in the global market and the national market as well.

The Leader of Government Business spoke about a number of challenges that the sector faces. No doubt, those challenges will remain for as long as all of us are around. Everything from the weather to our roads – actually getting our product to market is always a challenge for those in the industry. They talk to us about that almost every time we meet with them.

I think it was minister Vatskalis who said that the primary industry sector is a difficult environment. It is enormously difficult and competitive, yet those in the Territory who work in the sector are a resilient bunch because, time after time, they keep pitching. They are innovative, as are fellow farmers throughout the country, despite facing enormous difficulties and challenges with the drought at this time. Nevertheless, their resilience and, to a large

extent their creativity, puts them in good stead to not only come up with their own solutions but to, I believe, embrace those provided by the relevant government department, and by government.

The days are long gone when people will say as, indeed they used to, that government, politicians and bureaucrats did not know much about the land or the primary industry sector. Increasingly, through the necessity of globalisation being competitive, making a dollar and so on, those who work in the industry now include bureaucrats who work in the department. I know, minister, those who work in your department are very highly regarded, and rightly so. They understand the industry very well. I believe the Territory is very well served by the people who work in your department. I hope that they read my comments in that regard.

While I am on my feet, and since we have talked about the horticultural industry, minister, I ask - and I am happy to speak with you privately about it at another time - if you are aware that, when I gave my report to parliament last week about what I did in Singapore, there are endless possibilities for collaboration between the Territory and Singapore in the horticulture industry? There may well be the opportunity to further examine relationships with Charles Darwin University and relevant research facilities or centres. You would know that I dealt with National Parks, and that is a fantastic organisation. They regard Singapore as a horticultural hub. They do a range of wonderful things. I am sure that you have an idea of the work they do, but the possibilities are endless in harnessing an even better relationship with the Territory, and exploring what the possibilities are in the future. If any one person, or any one group or, indeed, an entire sector, can be better served by relationships at a government-to-government level and a department-to-department level, then all of us, as politicians, are doing our job and doing it well. I really encourage you, minister, and those you work with in the department, to knock on doors and explore what opportunities exist. I am happy to informally provide you with names and addresses, although I feel certain you will be able to access them in any event.

We would like a response regarding the Katherine Rural Farm. The member for Blain asked a fairly specific question. He asked if it is safe. We are looking forward to you saying yes. However, perhaps in your reply, you could elaborate on that.

The Minister for Employment, Education and Training talked about training. We encourage him and his department to continue their efforts in that regard. We have to get more people in these positions of working on the land, as it were, and the only way we can do that is to pitch, in

particular, I would have thought, to young people. In the Territory, it is different to farming communities in, say, New South Wales and Victoria. Although there certainly are generations of families who have been working on the land, increasingly in this day and age we see, whether it is in the Territory or elsewhere, young people taking off to do other things, and of course they should. But it would be great if we could encourage them back to the primary industries sector. I am happy to applaud whatever successful and worthwhile efforts and resources this government can pour into that objective.

In his reply, the minister might state whether he will give another progress report on this initiative to the Assembly in 12 or 18 months' time. I believe there needs to be an assessment of how well it is used, what the outcomes are and so on, as there should be with any initiative of the government. That is good old fashioned performance indicator stuff, and given that there have been a number of speakers in this debate expressing a broad range of interests, it would be good for all of us if the minister would come back at another time and tell us how it is going.

Also, and he may have done it in his statement, I cannot recall, but could he advise how those working in the sector are going to be advised of this initiative, and whether there is any need to assist them to work the initiative as well as we would all like them to. These days, people who are in the sector probably use computers more so than many other groups, but I wonder how the initiative is being disseminated to all in the sector. It might be a letter; it might be an advertising campaign within the sector. No doubt the minister has ideas about that but it is a reasonable question to ask: how is the information about what is clearly a good initiative communicated to those who it will best serve?

With those comments, minister, I look forward to your response. I know that you have been called on to respond to some other matters as well.

Mr NATT (Primary Industry and Fisheries):
Madam Speaker, I thank all members for their contributions and the considerable level of support that the Primary Industry Market Indicator, the PIMI, has received. It is a new Internet-based tool to analyse and identify the market opportunities for our primary industries' products for the domestic, interstate and international marketplace. It provides information to assist in maintaining and developing existing markets and identifying future market opportunities through the strategic development programs.

As my colleague, the member for Casuarina, outlined in his supportive statement, the

government has been proactive and taken a lead in developing the concept of PIMI. I congratulate him on his role in this. He was one of the instigators together with the chief executive of my department. The minister on several occasions visited many growers and pastoralists over the time he had this portfolio, and when talking to them they were emphasising they were looking for new market opportunities. It is fair to say that he had some direct input, together with the chief executive of my department, in putting this together.

Some of the growers are finding it confronting and perhaps challenging to move away from their current formats and the recognition of PIMI can take them to other levels if they are willing to have a go at it. That was the whole reason this concept was put together, and we feel it is going to play an important role into the future of the primary industry sector. The industry acknowledged the need for the tool to analyse and identify market opportunities and they say that there has been a need for something like this for some time.

The member for Nelson's claim that he had found two experienced people in the horticulture industry who did not support PIMI was a little disturbing and quite interesting because, in fact, the Northern Territory Horticultural Association has publicly endorsed the PIMI project. The NTHA, in its newsletter, offered the following support for PIMI, and I quote:

The PIMI will provide valuable information to those seeking to identify export opportunities and potential pitfalls.

The NTHA commends DPIFM for this initiative, believed to be the first of its kind in Australia.

... obtaining ... credible market research is a very costly venture and expanding into new export markets without market research can be even more costly.

The tool will only remain relevant if export knowledge and advice is fed into the system and I urge those with export experience and knowledge to participate by contributing data.

... Congratulations to all those in DPIFM who have contributed to the development of the PIMI, particularly Mr Rod Gobbey, who has been the primary driver for this initiative.

The development of PIMI will be recognised as a strategic investment into export development and will be of great benefit to those who require market information.'

That is a fantastic endorsement from the NTHA for the PIMI project. I am more than happy to supply a copy of that newsletter to the member for Nelson if he so requires. My department has received a great deal of support from peak body groups for the project. Specifically, I refer to the Northern Territory Horticultural Association, the Northern Territory Cattlemen's Association, the Northern Territory Agricultural Association and the Northern Territory Live Exporters Association. I am sure that even the member for Nelson recognises that this represents extremely sound endorsement of the PIMI project.

The member for Blain asked whether PIMI will replace other research areas, particularly contact with the public. PIMI will augment rather than replace other programs undertaken by the department. It will ensure that we are strategic and make decisions based on the best available information when investing public funds. I simply do not subscribe to the comment by the member for Blain that primary producers do not want to access or somehow fear the Internet. That was a remarkable statement. The member for Blain said:

The last thing which someone, who is struggling on the land trying to make a living, wants to do to have questions answered is to use the Internet to help solve some of their problems.

I can assure the member for Blain that there are many producers who are highly computerised and use the Internet to great advantage. The Internet will not only be used to communicate with the industry, it is also used to communicate among themselves as the growers. The Crops, Forestry and Horticulture Division of my department has conducted or participated in approximately 65 industry events, meetings and workshops each year for the last number of years. These events have been attended by over 1600 participants, and this is on the increase over the last few years. There are now more than 955 agricultural and horticultural publications available to the industry. The Crops, Forestry and Horticulture Division has published 170 plain English fact sheets, information sheets, posters, booklets and growing notes. In addition, 785 technical bulletins and reports were published by other areas of primary industry. These are available in hard copy, but what primary producer has time to pop into town to pick up something every time a new one has been published? Where do they go? They go to the Internet. That is where they source much of their information. For the member for Blain to say that those people on the land are finding it hard to make a living, and they cannot access, or do not want to access, or do not have time to access the Internet, I find quite strange.

One area that I have visited as minister is Mataranka. Recently, I visited the Younghusbands who have a melon farm there. They have shifted across from Kununurra in the last few years and have started a very successful melon growing operation just out of Mataranka. It is an innovative set up, and they are an innovative couple - they have a terrific set up there. They are doing a very good job. They have strategically set up a market alliance with other producers in the area and they have a cooperative marketing edge over a lot of the industry. That opens up a greater supply window for them, and the Internet and computerisation plays a significant part in production and the sale of their product.

The use of electronic data and information, and accessing that data and information, plays a vital role for many people on the ground, to the extent where, yesterday, I went to Berry Springs, to W.E.PACK Pty Ltd. I saw their operations where they were picking mangoes and it is a packing shed for about 80 growers I understand. At the moment, they are doing about 40 growers for those that are in season. To see their operation go from when the mangoes are picked from the tree, put into the packing case and the processes that go through to there, is quite amazing. They use a lot of the grey power people who travel up here during the colder seasons down south, and it is interesting to go back to computerisation again. Many of these grey power people were using the computerised mechanisms that had been installed to ensure that the product, when it is packed into the box, the boxes were collated and put on to pallets so that the growers and the producers know exactly where their product is going, and the feedback they get and what price they get is quite astounding. So computerisation and mechanisation is quite outstanding in the industry.

It is rather unfortunate the member for Blain has decided to travel during these sittings, however, he mentioned the crocodile meats that he is going to Taiwan to talk about. I will talk about that a little more in a minute.

FarmBiz is jointly funded by the Australian and Territory governments and provides funding to enhance the skills of our primary industry sector. We are currently committed to around \$300 000 per annum for FarmBiz, with the Commonwealth matching the Territory's contribution. The program has provided support to approximately 5000 participants and it combines Commonwealth/Territory government investment of over \$2m throughout the life of FarmBiz. The current edition of the FarmBiz program will end on 30 June next year and discussions are under way about the format of FarmBiz into the future.

In the Territory, FarmBiz has seen an increase in the support of training activities identified at the

management level. FarmBiz coordinators are currently located in Darwin, Katherine and Alice Springs and employed by the department. They have worked closely with individual producers, land managers and peak industry bodies to ensure the success of the program. I commend them for their efforts in getting involved with this process and the support they give on the ground.

Back to the member for Blain's trip to Taiwan to promote crocodile meat – PIMI provides a strategic filter to access where we should be investing our international marketing endeavours. PIMI means that we can make strategic decisions to ensure that we are focused on those markets with the greatest potential, rather than simply travelling willy-nilly to international destinations on an off chance that there could be a market there, and we have heard they have some sort of personal fascination with that overseas destination.

Had the member for Blain undertaken even a rudimentary analysis, he would have discovered that our crocodile industry is focused on the production of high value skins for international fashion markets. The crocodile meat from local farmers is consigned only to domestic markets. Readily accessible import data shows that Taiwan sources crocodile meat from low-cost suppliers throughout South-East Asia. It is interesting to note that part of the aspect of the member's trip is to look at crocodile meat, whereas the prices from Australia would not match the cheaper prices they are going to get from the cheaper South-East Asian market in Taiwan.

The member for Blain also touched on the facility's research and resources of our primary industries research farms, specifically the Katherine Research Farm. A previous budget for the Horticultural Division of about \$3m was for horticultural programs as well as the cost of running research farms. Research and development programs are across all plant industries, and there are some efficiencies from bringing all those agronomists together. Like all other assets and programs managed by my department, the Katherine Research Farm facility is assessed to ensure public funds are spent effectively in the delivery of agreed outcomes. As government, we need to ensure that we have the necessary infrastructure to deliver on agreed outcomes and respond to changing needs over time. I do not envisage any substantive changes to my department's facility at Katherine in the future.

The member for Blain also mentioned the briefing provided to him by the Western Australian minister for Agriculture on the Ord River Development Stage 2. I previously responded to that question raised by the member during the

estimates process last year. If the member would like to go back to the transcripts, it might jog his memory. In saying that, I emphasise again that the Ord River Development Stage 2 is a staged development. By definition, it will be developed from the west to the east. The dam which has created Lake Argyle was built in the late 1960s, more than 40 years ago. Stage 1 was developed in Western Australia. There are various options for developing Stage 2. It is dependent on the interest of the private sector. That is why there has been a call for expressions of interest. When a proponent for Ord River Stage 2 is selected, we can assess its implications for the Northern Territory. Northern Territory and Western Australian officials are continuing discussions about development options for the Ord and the most recent took place a couple of weeks ago between my department and various departmental officials from Western Australia.

I, as did my predecessor, have met with the Western Australian minister on a couple of occasions, and the Ord has been discussed. At this stage, it is a staged approach, a long way down the track. We will continue those discussions until there is a time where we need to step in and assess the value to the Northern Territory, and take the next step that is required.

The member for Nelson called the PIMI a 'shallow indicator'. I believe this is selling the indicator short. The PIMI is a new way of thinking, and will ensure we make more informed decisions that have not been possible in the past. Clearly, there is a need for a new way of thinking and this has been supported by industry. The member for Nelson unwittingly hit the nail on the head when he said: 'You do the research work and we hope the commercial industries will come and pick that up'. This is where PIMI will be of real benefit. Rather than research for the sake of research to see if a crop will grow in the Territory, efforts will be more focused on the crops that have been the best market opportunities for the Northern Territory.

I will take a few moments to explore the examples highlighted by the member for Nelson in demonstrating how PIMI will assist in growing our crops, forestry, and the horticultural industry. The member for Nelson highlighted past research into Taiwanese cabbages - although I think he means Chinese cabbages - and growing Taiwanese cauliflowers. Despite this research investment from the 1980s to 1986 and, again in the early 1990s, I am told that there is no commercial production of Chinese cabbage or cauliflowers in the Territory. The research has been undertaken, but industry has not picked it up.

The member for Nelson also suggested that we should be doing more research into innovative

crops. At the time, I encouraged the member for Nelson to seek a briefing on the research undertaken into innovative crops. For the member for Nelson, a great deal of research has been undertaken in innovative crops since the time you grew cabbages down on the Daly River. I do not mean this to be a criticism of the member for Nelson but rather than seem to be generally unaware of the research undertaken into the initiative of crops into the Northern Territory, it is time we went over some of the statistics that have occurred.

Over the last 20 years, my department has investigated more than 200 different crop types across the regions where 115 are horticultural. Only 25 of those crops are grown commercially in the Northern Territory as I speak. In terms of current research, there are 35 plant crop types currently under investigation by DPIFM. These crops include mango and citrus root stock types, the flowers, biofuel crops, table grapes and bush foods. Driven by a clear market opportunity, my department is growing bush tomatoes in partnership with the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre in Alice Springs and at Ti Tree. I have had the opportunity to visit the Desert Knowledge CRC to look at the experiment. The day I went there it was in very early forms of experimentation, but I had the opportunity to sample a couple of those desert tomatoes, and they are very tasty - I can imagine them sitting in a nice salad. It is an innovative approach to production in the Central Australian region. I am sure that with all the research and development happening in that area the crops will take off in the future.

There is a range of traditional vegetables at Ti Tree such as corn and melons used as training crops for indigenous trainees. The market is being used skill up indigenous people as employees into the future. There has been a number of carrot variety trials conducted in the Katherine Research and Coastal Plains Horticultural Research Farms, at a request of a commercial seed company. I am sure my colleagues opposite will agree that there is hardly a 'wait and see' approach. Successive governments in the Territory have done much and there is still much more to do.

It is no use producing or growing product unless you have a willing buyer for the right price. That is where PIMI will assist as a tool to help primary producers determine whether there are market requirements that match their production plans and where those markets might be.

The member for Goyder has a great passion and understanding of the importance of the primary industry sector. He knows the importance of the primary industry sector in the Northern

Territory. He recognises the innovations and the sustainability of the industry, and recognises that it is a competitive world out there and that an instrument ...

Madam SPEAKER: Minister, your time has expired.

Mr WARREN: Madam Speaker, I move that the minister be granted an extension of time pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr NATT: Thank you, Madam Speaker. The member for Goyder also recognised that it is a competitive world out there and that the Northern Territory needs to take that competitive advantage. This is where the PIMI tool will take that advantage out to our growers. It is a wonderful matrix that is adaptable, and it can be used when changes in the industry occur. Those changes are immediately passed onto the grower and we urge producers to have input into that as often as possible so the changes can be made, so that other people within the industry recognise those changes and can adapt to what is required on the ground at the time.

The member for Daly recognised visits that I have made to several properties and my predecessor's visits to properties. He also recognised the reliance on the industrial sector, in particular mining, because it affects much of his area and the Katherine region. The Douglas-Daly and Katherine regions are significant contributors to the plant industry. The Douglas-Daly region contributes about \$11.8m and the Katherine region about \$40.2m. This is significant input into the economy from those two regions.

He recognised the fact that forestry will also play an important role in the future. There has been significant planting of trees in those two areas and, although an economic outcome has not been produced at this stage, we hope that when the African Mahogany is mature enough to harvest, economic growth will be substantial within the Douglas-Daly and Katherine regions. Of course, that will be put into the PIMI so that people get a fair idea of how that industry progresses.

He outlined the reliability of data systems, computers and technologies available and how growers use the technology and access the website for climate information, fact sheets and the exchange of information between growers. He recognised that PIMI is important for primary producers in that area.

The member for Stuart has had significant input in the Ti Tree area. I have had the pleasure of visiting the Ti Tree area and a number of

properties in and around Alice Springs, Moe McCosker's hydroponics, for example, where they grow lettuce and herbs. He has a wonderful set up on the outskirts of Alice Springs. He has set himself up a little niche market and is doing extremely well. Ti Tree, where table grapes are grown, reaps about \$9m per year in expenditure on table grapes. It is great to see the Anmatjere Development Committee getting behind the establishment of primary industries in that area, to increase employment within the area, to enhance the prospects of indigenous people and give them a lifeline and an interest within the area in the hope that a little economic region can be set up for the future.

The other thing that he recognised is the availability of broadband in some of those areas. Access to the Internet is a big challenge and the technology needs to improve. My department works closely with all the people out there to try to get as much information to the people on the ground as they can. I am sure that will continue and I am looking forward to some great outcomes in Central Australia over the next few years. I acknowledge the member for Stuart's work on the ground for the department; the feedback that we get from him is invaluable.

The member for Wanguri recognised the government's efforts in the training and education processes that are undertaken to ensure that we have qualified and capable people working on the ground within the various primary industry areas. Indigenous training is an important factor this government is pushing to ensure that we can get indigenous people into employment. We have specifically targeted projects to ensure that happens. Primary industry is one of those targeted projects. He also mentioned Ti Tree and the IPP program which has had some wonderful success.

He mentioned the Katherine campus, the training of young rural people who wish to expand their horizons and increase their experience. The Katherine campus plays an important role for young rural people, as does the Charles Darwin Rural College. He outlined a number of subjects and training available through the college and the practical experience that young rural people gain by attending these campuses. I thank him and the Department of Education for their support as well.

Moving to other areas, the member for Nelson talked about the Queensland research into mangoes. I am sure he will be keen to hear that the Northern Territory is a partner in all the DIPE mango projects in the Northern Territory, just as the Queensland DIPE is a partner in the crop forecasting project the Northern Territory is running in Queensland. The DPIMF department retains about 25% equity in the first stage of the

Western Australia and CSIRO, and the second stage variety is to be available into the Northern Territory industry. Sometimes we need to weigh up the benefits of being parochial about all mango research being undertaken in the Territory, and also the costs of replicating that same research in Western Australia, Queensland, Northern Territory and New South Wales.

The idea of PIMI originated with government, and has been road tested and developed with peak stakeholders. There is simply no use introducing or growing product unless we have a willing buyer at the right price. It has to be a commercial and viable proposition for the department to become involved. What we are also looking for is some feedback from the industry. I speak to growers on the ground and they raise many different ideas they would like to see us doing different things, but when it comes to the end of the day, we need them to try to sort out where the research needs to be focused. We will continue to work with all sectors within the industry. The government will never turn their back on research; I can assure everyone in this House that that will never happen. We will continue to work with all sectors to ensure that that research is undertaken.

We need the support of the growers in all those sectors to ensure that we can start focusing on specific aspects of the research that they want us to do. We want them to prioritise the research, and we will work with them in partnership so that we can identify and go through all the issues that we need to go through to ensure there is commercial viability, and what the probabilities are of growing the particular crop in the Northern Territory. I am happy to make an offer to industry to assist them if they want to look for new varieties. I know that this offer has been made before, and we are looking forward to hearing from the industry on that. We have spoken to the Horticultural Association about that, and I will be speaking with them in early November to push that point through to them again.

Madam Speaker, I take this opportunity to recognise the development team which put PIMI together: Annie Black, the project officer for PIMI; Mark Christie, the department's multimedia and technical applications manager, who wrote the code and designed it; Christine Long, the Director of Primary Industry, Industry Services, who manages the project; together with Rod Gobbey, the Executive Director for Primary Industry, who developed the concept, resourced it and made it a reality. Officers in the Department of the Chief Minister, and the Department of Business, Economic and Regional Development have also played a vital role.

In closing, Madam Speaker, it is important to note that we recognise the pastoralists and horticulture people as pioneers in this industry. We will continue to work with them as best we can to ensure that the primary industries sector moves ahead.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT Supporting Our Bushfire Volunteers

Ms LAWRIE (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage): Madam Speaker, today I talk about bushfires in the Northern Territory and the Territorians who fight them. Bushfires are one of the dominant features of the Territory, and while they affect some more than others, every Territorian is affected by them in one way or another, whether you are a tourist seeing scorched roadsides, a resident of the northern suburbs of Darwin with smoke and ash falling in your pool, a pastoralist in Central Australia with nothing to feed your stock for years, or a rural resident threatened with the loss of everything you own.

To place bushfires into their context, the Northern Territory straddles a number of environmental zones ranging from desert to tropical savannah. All of these are subject to bushfires, with the tropical north recognised internationally as one of the most fire prone habitats on the Earth. On average, 15 million ha of Territory is burned each year - more than two Tasmanias. This has been the case for a long time - so long, in fact, that a large number of plants species, the quintessentially Australian gum tree among them, are fire adapted.

The tropical Top End is unique in that it has an annual fire regime. Every year, intense Wet Season vegetation growth provides fuel for fires that cures or dries in the Dry Season and burns ferociously as the weather heats up in the latter part of the year. We are in the middle of the fire season right now. Fires in September alone burned over 100 000 km² or 10 million ha, and had an impact upon every region of the Territory. Extreme fire weather has led to fire authorities to declare 23 fire bans so far this year; that is, 23 days when conditions were so bad that bushfires would be almost impossible stop.

The impact of these fires is enormous. Bushfires have the potential to retard or destroy a large proportion of the Territory's important economic drivers. The cattle industry is worth over \$200m per year to the Territory and relies on the protection of infrastructure and fodder from fires. The horticulture industry is also an important element of the Territory economy, and much of it occurs in the Darwin rural area. The Darwin rural

area lies largely within an area defined as the Vernon Bushfires Region - and I want to talk a little about that region as an illustration of the impact fires have on the Territory.

The Vernon Bushfires Region covers an area of 11 930 km² just outside Darwin. Going south on the Stuart Highway, it starts at the Elizabeth River and ends just south of the Adelaide River township. From the Arnhem Highway, it starts at Trippe Road and includes the Marrakai area. It runs to the coast, including Gunn Point in the north and Channel Point in the west, and takes in Cox Peninsula as well. The area includes Litchfield National Park, Aboriginal land, cattle stations, mango orchards, and a large number of rural residential blocks.

The Vernon region is growing. The *Northern Territory News* had a double-page spread on the growth in the rural area on Monday, 1 October. This article indicated substantial population growth in the rural area and showed a large amount of investment people are making, building their dream home among the gum trees. The so-called 'tree change' phenomenon is well recognised around Australia and poses significant problems for fire management agencies everywhere. Many of the people moving from an urban environment to the bush often have little knowledge of rural fire management issues and practices.

In addition to homes, there are substantial investments in horticulture in the region. The horticulture industry has grown dramatically in the last 10 years, with an estimated \$457m in investment in the last decade, and a gross mango crop value of \$340m in that period. The cost of maintaining the industry is estimated to be between \$40m and \$50m per year. This enormously important industry lies in the heart of the fire prone savannah.

In 2006, almost half the area of the Vernon Bushfire Region was burned - or 46.3% to be precise. Already this year, we have seen 45.9% of the region burned and we still have between four to eight weeks of the fire season left. One fire in August cost nearly \$0.5m in destroyed crop. Whilst this loss is tragic and we feel for the owners of those trees, it is also worth noting what we managed to save during that fire. While numbers are debateable when predicting where our fire might have spread to, this same fire was fought for three days by volunteer bushfire brigades and Bushfires NT staff. The estimated value of houses, orchards and other rural enterprises that were saved is estimated at \$25m.

This was achieved for a total outlay of less than \$20 000. While volunteers inform me that, at times, it was touch and go, it is a feat only made possible by the fact that most of the hard work of

firefighting was done by members of the community; that is, volunteers. These savings were achieved over a three-day period. An exhaustive analysis of the savings across the Territory have not been undertaken, but it is the case that volunteers put in thousands of hours fighting fires in the Territory every year, and fires occur daily throughout the fire season.

In addition to the damage to property, fires threaten the lives of many, particularly the volunteers who fight to contain them. There are many important areas of our society where volunteers play a vital role. Fighting bushfires is up there with the most important of them all.

Most bushfires in Australia are fought by volunteers and the Territory is no exception. The *Bushfires Act*, while usually noted for its punitive clauses such as fines for starting fires and failure to install firebreaks, is principally established to assist the community to get organised to manage fire together. The *Bushfires Act* provides for a network of regional committees to advise government and co-op the support and resources of local residents. It provides a framework for the establishment of Volunteer Bushfire Brigades and provides a constitutional structure for brigades in its regulations. Over many years, aided by the advice of the Bushfires Council and the 10 regional Bushfires Committees, government and committees have worked to train and equip volunteers to fight fires safely. Today, there are some 450 volunteers and 21 Volunteer Bushfire Brigades, as well as more than 600 people on pastoral and Aboriginal land trained to respond to bushfires. It is these people who principally fight fires and it is these people whose lives are threatened by bushfires.

Mentioning the names of volunteers is always a bit difficult. Those I mention will be embarrassed and then there are the hundreds of others who are not mentioned but deserve recognition. I will mention some names because I want to illustrate the amount of effort these people put in: Di Tynan from the Elizabeth Valley Brigade spent 244 hours on fires; Dave McLaughlin from Lambells Lagoon, 332 hours; Max Kennon from Livingstone Brigade, 244 hours; Louie King, also from Livingstone, 383 hours; Frank Dunstan from Darwin River Brigade, 459 hours; and the captain of the Darwin River Brigade, Dave Mullavey put in 524 hours.

Other outstanding contributors are: from the Acacia Hills Volunteer Bushfire Brigade, Garry Nichols; from the Alice Springs Brigade, Phil Walker, Andrew May, Peter Gillat and Petra Yan; from the Batchelor/Adelaide River/Tortilla Brigade, Lyle Johnson, Vic Fox, Phil Webb, Fred Byrnes, Ian McIntosh and Greg Taylor; from the Beatrice Hill Brigade, Sam Griffin, Ken Griffin, Sonya

Wiffen, John Gosen and Wayne Hamilton; from Berry Springs Bridge, Lance Cameron and Ron Thomas; from the Cox Peninsula Brigade, Ray Nichols; from the Daly River Brigade, Brian Muir; from the Daly Waters Brigade, Karl Roth; from the Darwin River, Sue Mullavey, Shane Mullavey and Roy Warde; from the Douglas Daly Brigade, Doug McKean, and Scott Rixon; from the Dundee Brigade, Trevor Cockin, Ian Stewart, Syd Jenkins, Geoff Ashendon, Les Pleitner and Cindy Pleitner; from the Edith Farms Brigade, George Thompson, Ted Walker, June Walker and Diane Dare; from the Katherine Brigade, Bob Wright, Jan Murphy, Adam Redpath, Kenny Wright, Cathy Hallworth and Wendy Coghlin; from the Labasheeda Brigade, Dave Joyce; from the Lambells Lagoon Brigade, Ken Baulch, Steve Solomon and Michael Delis; from the Livingstone Brigade, Vic Statham, Dave Barclay, Byron Griffiths, Dave Burnam and Rob Bassett; from the Manton Brigade, Janine Curtis and Dave Wills; from Milne Brigade, Eddie Brown and Peter O'Brien; from the Point Stuart Brigade, Ian Bradford and Tony Searle; from Tennant Creek Brigade, Justin Hankinson, Robin Pearce, Karl Milkins, Ian Taylor, Tanka Bethel and Greg Liebelt.

Madam Speaker, I realise it is a little unusual to list so many people in a ministerial statement, but these people deserve the recognition. Of course, the danger of mentioning them is those I have missed, and no doubt there are many. I am sure local members contributing to this debate will have other people to mention and I encourage them to do so. All these volunteers work tirelessly with Bushfires NT staff to limit the damage that bushfires cause in the Northern Territory.

Unfortunately, the civic mindedness of this group is directly contrasted with the drop dead stupidity of some other individuals. I refer to those individuals who deliberately light fires in an unsafe manner. Sadly, so many of the fires in the Northern Territory that cause damage, that threaten our property, our economy and our volunteers are lit by people. Members will reflect that there is no lightning over most of the Territory at this time of year. Certainly, there are accidents. In 2007, we know of fires being started by slashers, welders and whipper snippers, but these accidental ignitions appear to be in the minority.

Most fires are started deliberately. The perpetrators may feel they have very good personal justification for starting fires and we will just have to imagine what they are. I ask you to imagine because I cannot see what would justify the potential to cause millions of dollars of damage and potential loss of life.

Of course, the courts do not look favourably on breaches of the *Bushfires Act* and when we have enough evidence to be able to launch a

prosecution, the courts have a 100% success rate in achieving convictions and issuing fines. Our government has assisted this process by substantially increasing the fines for offences under the act, with the penalty for illegally starting a fire now up to \$25 000 or five years' imprisonment. Prosecution is, of course, only part of the answer.

We are working to a risk management framework known as the 5 Rs. The 5 Rs are: research; risk modification; readiness; response; and recovery. We are working on implementing the 5 Rs and I wish to touch briefly on some areas in which we are making progress. Bushfires NT host some of the world's leading researchers into bushfires. Research programs range from the behaviour and impact of fire in arid vegetation types to the effective use of satellite data to characterise fire intensity and area. Perhaps the best reported research is that which underpins West Arnhem Fire Management Agreement, WAFMA. This world-first project is actively reducing greenhouse gas emissions from fire with a positive impact upon Australia's emissions and, in turn, upon climate change. This project is typical of how fire is managed in the Territory insofar as it is a collaborative effort. It involves the input of landholders, in this case traditional owners from west Arnhem Land, Bardayal Nadjamerrek, or Lofty, as he is known, Nigel Gellar, Peter Billess, Victor Gulnar, their extended families and many others.

The support of the Northern Land Council throughout the development of this project has been essential. The work behind the scenes by John Sheldon has nursed the project through its infancy. The WAFMA project relies on cutting edge research. Research work conducted by Professor Jeremy Russell-Smith, Dr Peter Jacklyn, Gary Cooke, Andrew Edwards, Peter Brocklehurst, John Schatz, and many others allowed fire managers to target their activities.

Fire management coordination by Peter Cooke has allowed the research to be put into action. In different clan estates within the WAFMA area, work is coordinated by Mick Pierce and Ray Whear, Dean Yibarbuk, Sean Ansell, Ben Lewis and the rangers from Djelk, Jawoyn, Manwurrk and Bulman. When wildfires threaten the project area late in the year, more people become involved.

Bushfires NT Regional Fire Control Officer, Michael Carter, has provided advice and leadership based on over 20 years of fighting fires in the Territory to ensure the project area remains free from fire. This goes to illustrate the important point that research in the fire management industry is not static, something to be placed in a report and left on a shelf. Indeed, COAG

recognised the importance of letting the community have access to information regarding fire. Education is vital to ensure viable and safe occupation of our fire prone landscape. As more people live in the rural area every year, this information becomes crucial.

We are working to develop fire awareness education more generally. Bushfires NT is working with the Tropical Savannas CRC to develop an interactive education tool for schools. This is nearing completion and I look forward to launching it in time for the next school year. Bushfires NT is also working closely with staff from Taminmin High School, the high school which services the Darwin rural area, to develop improved awareness of and preparedness for fires among the younger generation - our future land managers and fire fighters.

We have also increased our efforts to raise awareness in the community about fire. We are working with ABC local radio to develop a protocol for issuing information about fires to assist local communities to make decisions about fires as and when they occur. To their lasting credit, ABC local radio has made a huge contribution to community safety across Australia and we are very grateful for their assistance in the Territory. With their assistance, new messages about fire and its management will be created specifically for the Territory and will be available for broadcast before the next fire season.

Risk modification includes all those things that we might do to reduce the potential impact fires have on our lives, property and the environment. To start the process, Bushfires NT recently completed a risk assessment identifying those areas and practices that may lead to higher than acceptable risk. The areas of concern fall within the 5 Rs and are being developed and implemented currently.

The first of these is the need for nationally accredited training. Over the last 12 months, we have developed a new training course for volunteer firefighters and staff that is accredited by the Australian National Training Authority. This training provides a practical basis to safe, effective firefighting and will see the Territory operating at the same high standard of all other jurisdictions.

Risk modification also involves ensuring that effective equipment is available when needed. I want to mention some special efforts that we are making to improve the availability of equipment in rural and remote communities. In the last year, we have been able to provide six community ranger groups with grass fire units. These vehicles had previously been used by volunteer brigades and have been sold at cost to ranger groups who would otherwise have to buy

expensive vehicles and fit the firefighting equipment themselves. In this arrangement, the volunteer brigades are able to maintain their state of preparedness and ranger groups are able to upgrade their capacity to manage their land.

In another initiative, Bushfires NT has been able to access the federal government's Natural Disaster Mitigation Program grant funding to assist fire management preparedness over large areas of the Territory. One element of this is the provision of a firefighting trailer to the community of Kintore. This trailer has been a great success and was used to save the local store from a fire only one month after it was delivered. This is a great example of the practical efforts we are making to improve fire preparedness across the Territory.

Madam Speaker, members will be well aware that an important part of being ready for a fire is planning. Bushfires NT is currently undertaking a planning program to initiate or update a fire plan for every property in the Territory outside the metropolitan areas. In more remote districts, this means sitting down with every landholder, armed with a history of the fires in the region and a local understanding of the country, to generate a fire plan specific to that property. In the more densely populated peri-urban areas, Bushfires NT is about to start planning workshops in a number of areas. These will encourage rural residents to come along to learn about fire in an informal environment and to leave with a specific plan for their property.

Timely response by the community, including the general public, volunteer bushfire brigades and Bushfires NT staff is essential if we are to continue to live comfortably in the Territory. In recognition of the growing number of extreme fire weather events - more than twice the average of 16 last year, with 35, and already up to 23 this year - action has been taken to improve responsiveness. New protocols for fire ban days have been implemented for the rural area, including a heightened alert for firefighters and the trial of an aerial water bomber. The government has brought the Air Tractor 802 to the Territory. The air tractor is placed on standby on fire ban days and is available to provide a big hit to fires as soon as they start. Experience around the world has shown that this is the best chance we have of arresting a fire in extreme weather conditions. Staff and volunteers are being trained in the operation of the air tractor, and when and where to use it. Used in conjunction with ground crews, the air tractor has already been very effective in arresting several fires which threatened homes in the Batchelor and Humpty Doo areas. It has also been notable that the air tractor has been used in joint operations with the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service.

The most important element of recovery after a bushfire is the opportunity to learn from the experiences of a fire event. Bushfires NT conducts regular debriefs following fires in order to constantly improve practice, learn from local knowledge, and train less experienced staff. Following larger fires, community meetings may also be arranged, as occurred following the recent Acacia Hills fire. This meeting was called by the local community, but provided an opportunity for the public, volunteers and staff to express their thoughts and feelings and develop an approach that will improve our chances of minimising the fire risk next season.

The 5 Rs is the national response to the horrific bushfires seen in 2002-03. Recent projections regarding climate change suggest that vigorous efforts will need to be made if we wish to even maintain the status quo. Recent national reports on a study of the effects of climate change on fires in south-eastern Australia make grim reading. The study, undertaken by the Bureau of Meteorology, CSIRO and the Bushfires CRC, indicates a marked increase in fire weather. In fact, the worst case projections indicate as much as a 300% increase in extreme fire danger days by 2050. Even the lower scenarios project an increase of 5% by 2020. Conditions will be so bad that it will be necessary to institute two new categories of fire weather, 'very extreme' and 'catastrophic'.

Bushfires NT has been working with the scientists who prepared this report to generate seasonal fire weather predictions for the Territory. The principal author indicates that the general trend is broadly applicable to the Territory; that is, we are going to get more extreme fire weather here in the future - and it is the near future we refer to. On average, we have 16 days of extreme fire weather in the Territory. Last year, we had 35 days where the conditions warranted the declaration of a fire ban. So far this year, we have declared 33 fire ban days with some of the most extreme conditions in memory. It is, perhaps, too early to speculate if this is the effect of climate change. However, it is not too early to start planning for the future.

There is more bad news. Introduced grasses are already having a devastating effect on fire behaviour in the Top End. Because they stay green longer, they burn later in the year. Because they are denser than the native grasses, they burn up to eight times hotter, taking grass fires into the range of forest fires from southern Australia. Because they burn so hot, they tend to destroy much of the rest of the local vegetation. Not surprisingly, we are now receiving many stories of bushfire brigade volunteer vehicles being damaged by grass fires - a rare event only a decade ago.

I have talked at length about bushfires and the damage they cause to the lives of Territorians and our economy. The damage is real and the threat returns every year. I have also talked about the savings that are achieved by a small dedicated group of volunteers and an even smaller group of staff. This small group of volunteers and staff have managed to save the homes of hundreds of families in 2007 alone. They risk their lives for their community and come back every year. They are an ageing group and have trouble recruiting.

Members may remember an article in the *NT News* on 12 September regarding the retirement of one of our bushfire volunteers. Ron Thomas is retiring from Berry Springs Volunteer Bushfires Brigade this year because he is turning 80. Even at a young 79, Ron and many others like him put in enormous amounts of time and effort protecting people from fires. In 2006, Ron put in 401 hours on fires. That is about 10 weeks' full-time work. As I said, there are many others who are not listed here, and I want to make it plain that they all do a fantastic job. There are brigades in Katherine, Douglas Daly, Point Stuart, Tennant Creek and Alice Springs. They have all been instrumental in controlling wild bushfires that threaten to destroy large areas of the Territory.

Even more than in southern Australia, being a bushfire volunteer in the Territory can be a demanding and time-consuming job. Many of our volunteers work for 10 weeks or more a year on fire management, and they do it for the satisfaction that comes from knowing they are making a difference. However, they are ageing and, as they retire, we will have some big shoes to fill. We are working with the volunteer organisations to try to improve this situation, but I ask the Chamber to take this opportunity to acknowledge the enormous effort and to provide a vote of thanks for our bushfire volunteers for the work they have done and continue to do.

While I am sure this thanks will be appreciated, more needs to be done. We have been working to improve the resources available to fight fires in the Territory. We recently spent \$229 000 extending the Batchelor Bushfires Office. This office lies at the centre of our rural area and, during the Dry Season, is a beehive of activity. As the numbers of staff working at the facility has grown, the 20-year-old demountable became unsatisfactory. A new building now provides adequate space to run an intensive bushfires operation. We have invested in new equipment and technology. So far this year, we have spent \$106 000 on the Air Tractor 802 and over \$125 000 on helicopters to fight bushfires. We are in the process of spending \$416 000 on new grass fire units, with five supplied this year.

As I said, more needs to be done. To this end, I have requested the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts to prepare a strategic submission which takes account the likely effect of climate change on management of fire in the Northern Territory. As the Territory grows, information about, and investment in, fire management will be crucial to our safe and successful development.

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

Mrs MILLER (Katherine): Mr Deputy Speaker, I respond to the minister for Natural Resources' statement on supporting our bushfire volunteers. Our society would not be able to function properly without volunteers. It is incredible how many there are in our communities covering so many areas of need. Volunteers are the backbone, especially in regional and remote communities, providing much needed services.

Today, I acknowledge all the hard-working volunteers, and the hard work they put into fighting bushfires throughout the Northern Territory. They face many risks and sometimes quite dangerous situations while carrying out their volunteer work and protecting our natural resources. It is vital that the training these volunteers receive is comprehensive and as professional as possible. I have the greatest respect for all people who voluntarily give of their time so willingly to look after the safety of others and very high on that list are bushfire volunteers.

When it comes to protecting our natural resources and property from bushfires, there is no discrimination of the sexes. Both men and women train together as volunteers and work as excellent teams, and in the rural areas, in many instances, husbands and wives, are part of the volunteer teams. Many of the rural and remote bushfire units would not be able to work effectively without both men and women training and working together. One of the reasons for this is purely because of the number of people living in most regional and remote locations relying on each other for all of their services.

I was born in an area where every blade of grass was precious; everything leafy and green was precious. The whole of Eyre Peninsula in South Australia had, and still does have, a very low annual rainfall. All pasture was precious because it was the feed for the sheep and cattle on farming properties. To have a bushfire on the Eyre Peninsula was disastrous for mixed farming properties with not only significant loss of animal life, but also the loss of feed for stock.

In late 1989, when we arrived in Katherine, it was the beginning of the Wet Season and in those

days you could almost time the storms each afternoon at around four o'clock, and we were absolutely fascinated with them and more so with the enormous volumes of rain that came with each storm. More rain would fall in two days in Katherine than the whole annual rainfall in some areas around where I was born and raised. People used to tell us that you could watch the grass grow, and they were quite right. I have never seen anything like it. You could almost see the lawn and our gardens grow and of course the weeds joined in too, and boy, they just did not stop growing. The growth next to the roads and the highways was sometimes over 1 m high at the end of the Wet Season. That certainly knew how to grow very quickly. You do not need to have much imagination to know how dense the undergrowth was and how available for massive fires when this high grass dried off following the Wet Season.

Being used to the devastation of bushfires in country South Australia you can imagine what it was like when we experienced our first Dry Season. It seemed to me that as soon as the rains stopped, the fires seemed to start smouldering away, even while there was still greenery around. It took a couple of years for either of us not to jump with alarm whenever we heard the sound of fire sirens as they raced through the main street of Katherine. They would be on their way to ensure that the fire, wherever it was, was not going to harm any property or animals if they could help it.

It was very interesting when we had Red Gum Tourist Park, the alarm that used to be displayed by the tourists when they arrived. They would walk in and say: 'We just have to tell you, there's a bushfire down the road and it's about 20 km down the road and there's nobody fighting it.' We spent a lot of time in the years that we were at Red Gum reassuring visitors that in the Northern Territory it is an entirely different situation to the southern states, and please do not worry.

The Dry Season is the most arduous time for bushfire volunteers in regional areas of the Northern Territory. There is no respite as these people are on call 24 hours and drop everything to assist their neighbours near and far. When we were running Red Gum Tourist Park, one of our staff, Christa Vale, lived on a property at Edith Farms and was a bushfire volunteer. Christa is a daughter of one of the outstanding volunteers the minister has mentioned in her statement, George Thompson. At Red Gum we had an arrangement that if she was called during work hours, she would leave work to assist wherever she could. Having lived out there, they relied on themselves to fight bushfires and the small number of people there were to assist.

The support and cooperation of bushfire volunteers in a small community can mean the difference between destruction of one's house and all your possessions to just having some blackened ground and trees around your property. Neither option is one that most people would want, but to lose your house and possessions in a bushfire would be heartbreaking. It was bad enough during the Katherine flood to lose so much through flooding, but fire leaves very little to be salvaged. Flood, at least, gives the opportunity to salvage something.

As the minister noted, there is, on average, 15 million ha of the Northern Territory burnt each year, which is more than two Tasmanias. That is an incredible amount of fire, not to mention the smoke or the greenhouse gas which result from those fires.

Last year at the end of May, the Substance Abuse committee was at Nhulunbuy for community hearings. On our way back to Darwin, it was a very clear sky with no clouds at all, but we could not see the ground. We could not see any of the landscape at all on our way back from Nhulunbuy because of the smoke from bushfires. Even at that time of year, it covered the whole area. That was very disappointing, and certainly is not good for the NT as far as greenhouse gas emissions go. One of the most serious challenges facing the Northern Territory is trying to control the amount of fire that causes greenhouse gases. Of course, there is so much of the Northern Territory that is inaccessible when there is a fire. That will always pose a problem.

I am very supportive of the government's investment in the Air Tractor 802. This equipment is very important in the fight against fires, especially in hard to access locations. Its use will be of significance when fighting bushfires close to residential properties. It can drop over 3000 litres of water or other fire retardant in one drop, which is very useful. I welcome that addition to firefighting in the Territory. I know that it has proved very successful in southern states.

There are not too many Territorians who will not be affected one way or another by bushfires in the future, either by a fire on their property or someone else's property, or by the smoke that carries so far from the site of a fire, or when they are travelling down the highway during the Dry Season.

The most important thing is to be vigilant and be prepared. Volunteer fire fighters are constantly training and upskilling, but each community unit will always welcome more volunteers to assist in their vital community work.

The minister listed some names of people who have contributed so much over a very long time to voluntary work with fighting bushfires. I congratulate them and appreciate their invaluable contribution to the protection and preservation of our communities.

I would like to add some names to that list. I, like the minister, risk leaving some people out, but I can assure them that it is not intentional; all volunteers are very much appreciated. In the Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade in addition to Bob Wright, Jan Murphy, Adam Redpath, Kenny Wright, Cathy Hallworth and Wendy Coghlin, I would like to add Ron Humphries, Ann Humphries, Kelly Linger, Scott Lander, Steven Hyatt and Susie White, who, I might add, is pregnant. There is another little volunteer firefighter coming into the world.

There are many others from the Katherine community who have given support and continue to give support when it is needed. Bob Wright of the Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade has been a long-term volunteer who joined the Katherine brigade in 1982. He is a prime example of the commitment that rural people make to helping out their community. Past members of the Katherine brigade, and there are many of them, include Keith Landsdowne, Wally Christie and Tig Donnellan.

The Edith Farms Brigade was formed around six years ago when the area was given their own firefighting equipment, and members who lived at Edith Farms moved their volunteer services from the Katherine brigade. The two services work very well together and give support to each other whenever it is required. George Thompson, Ted Walker, June Walker and Diane Dare are the main volunteers at Edith Farms and have been since its establishment.

Unfortunately for Edith Farms, Ted, June and their daughter, Diane, are moving shortly to live in Tully in Queensland. Their story of how they came to be in Katherine is similar to many that I have heard over the years, and that is, they were on a holiday, arrived in Katherine in 1969, and have been either there or somewhere in the Top End ever since. I thank Ted and June Walker and Diane Dare for the volunteer work they have given to the Edith Farms Brigade, and wish them all the very best in their new location. They are going to be sorely missed as far as the Edith Farms Brigade is concerned.

When the Edith Farms Brigade first established, there were over 40 volunteers, but unfortunately that number has significantly dwindled in recent years, with people moving away from the area, and they have told me that is mainly due to the lack of power and road structure

in that area. I certainly hope that, of those people still living out there, more will come forward to volunteer for the brigade, and receive the training that will equip them with the skills to fight the fires that we are always on the lookout for that threaten properties at Edith Farms.

I support your comments, minister, in relation to the idiots who think it is fun to light fires whenever and wherever you feel like it. It is highly likely that those people will not be reading *Hansard* to know just how much in contempt they are held. The penalties to deal with them are nowhere near harsh enough. They put the lives of valuable community volunteers, the property of hard-working people, livestock and native animals at risk. They get a kick out of lighting a fire to satisfy some sick compulsion of their own. I am contemptuous of their actions and hope that they get caught and pay a heavy price for their stupidity. Unfortunately, all of what I have just said, and as I have previously said, will not be heard by the people who really need to hear it.

Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, in today's *Northern Territory News* there is a report of a large fire being deliberately lit in 10 different spots along a 1 km stretch of dirt road around Lake Girraween, 25 km south of Darwin. That report stated that 25 fires using 14 vehicles were in action to prevent the fires from causing damage to people's property and their homes. Fortunately they were able to save their homes. A majority of those people fighting this latest fire would have been volunteers who would have left their work and families to support landowners. This fire is another example of the stupidity of some people who I sincerely hope are caught and punished. They put the lives of all who fight these fires at risk.

The projects that have been and are being established across the Territory, especially with traditional landowners, will go a long way to address the excessively high greenhouse gas emissions for which the Territory is, unfortunately, well known. Controlled burning strategies during the Dry Season will assist in this reduction, and education, education, education is the key to imparting knowledge to all Territorians about how to deal with bushfires. Training of our volunteers through a national accredited training course is extremely important for the high skills and standards that are expected in fighting fires right across all jurisdictions, in addition to the safety and protection of all volunteers.

Bushfires in the more remotely populated areas of the Northern Territory pose so many challenges. Inaccessibility and lack of water prevent many fires on pastoral properties from being able to be controlled and having to burn out to an area where they can be controlled.

Bushfires result in the loss of so much pasture and, in turn, result in a huge expense to the property owners having to buy stock feed. An example of this was when there was a huge bushfire in the Barkly several years ago which burnt across thousands of hectares.

With the prediction that we are going to have increasingly hotter weather in our Dry Seasons, in addition to heavier rainfalls in the Northern Territory in the future, it is, unfortunately, also predictable that Territorians will experience more intense bushfires. It is to all our benefits that Territorians are trained and knowledgeable about dealing with bushfires, with what we already experience and what would appear to be a most serious concern into the future.

I acknowledge the hard work that the volunteer bushfire fighters do throughout the Territory. The statement that the minister has delivered today acknowledges the work that all of them are doing. We would be lost without the hard work that these people do. I thank the minister for her statement.

Mr WARREN (Goyder): Mr Deputy Speaker, I also support the minister's statement on supporting our bushfire volunteers - a most noble and valuable part of our community. I will start by relating that bushfires are a very big part of our life here, but some of us have grown up in areas which were devastated on a yearly basis by bushfires.

As a young lad, I lived in the rural outskirts of Sydney, around the Menai and Heathcote areas which is, in that particular vicinity, next to the national park, the most fire prone area within New South Wales, south-west of Sydney. Bush firefighting has come a long way since those days, but it really is a strong element of people's lives when, on an annual basis, you run the risk of losing your house, and relatives could be badly injured in fighting fires. It is one of those areas that is really driven home to you as a young child: that fires are a really devastating aspect of people's lives.

To come up here and be involved as the local member in supporting, as much as I can, the local bushfire brigades is very pleasing to me. The government support of them is excellent. I go on record as saying that it is a very important aspect that government continues to support our bushfire volunteers.

I also commend the minister for directing NRETA to prepare a strategic submission that takes account of the likely effect of climate change on fire management in the Northern Territory. As more and more evidence of the causes and the impacts of climate change become evident, we need to ensure that we ramp up our climate

change risk assessments in the Northern Territory to ensure we do our fair share to mitigate these impacts. Given the potential significant changes in climate, I agree with the minister that there is a real need to increase our knowledge so that we can develop appropriate strategies to reduce the risks and increase the benefits for the Territory as a whole.

Some of the statistics quoted by the minister are alarming and highlight the need to improve our management of fire. We have been told that, on average, 15 million ha or 150 000 km² of the Territory is burnt out each year. This means that fire consumes about 40% of the Top End every single year. Fires in September alone burned out over 100 000 km² or 10 million ha this year. Bushfires have an impact on every region in the Territory. That is a pretty staggering figure and a pretty staggering aspect when you consider it that way.

We know that bushfires produce the majority of the Territory's greenhouse gas emissions - about 8.1 million tonnes across Northern Australia. Fires in savannah woodlands are responsible for almost 3% of Australia's greenhouse gas emissions. Consequently, if we were to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from fires by just 1% or even 2%, this would clearly have an impact on national levels. This is achievable.

I would like to outline the West Arnhem Land Fire Management Agreement, or the WALFA, as an outstanding example of a fire management project in the Territory that has already achieved significant results. This agreement was announced in the middle of last year by my colleague, the previous minister for the Environment and member for Arafura.

It is a carbon credit trading agreement designed to offset greenhouse gas emissions from the Wickham Point gas plant. The West Arnhem Land Fire Management Agreement between the NT government, Darwin Liquefied Natural Gas, Northern Land Council and traditional owners of land in West Arnhem is a world first. It brings together the world's oldest cultures with western science. It is also the first time that a major energy company has formed a partnership with Aboriginal traditional owners to foster returns to traditional fire management regimes.

The WALFA scheme employs ancient indigenous practice and contemporary scientific knowledge to reduce wild fires. This will help to conserve the environment and the cultural values of the Arnhem Land plateau. These include numerous rock art sites and around 77 000 ha of rain forest which was being damaged by repeated bushfires. Techniques being employed include cross-cultural planning and assessment, long

cross-country bush walks, burning programs undertaken increasingly by traditional landowners of Western Arnhem Land, and sophisticated fire mapping technologies.

The union of traditional knowledge and land management practices combined with contemporary science is expected to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 100 000 tonnes a year, the equivalent of taking 20 000 cars off the Territory's roads. A major peripheral outcome will be the provision of meaningful jobs for indigenous people over the long term. Other benefits for indigenous communities will include the building of practical literacy and numeracy skills and thus the strengthening of cross-cultural confidence. These are essential to future economic opportunities in areas like tourist enterprises. Research that underpinned the validity of this agreement was coordinated by the Tropical Savanna CRC and involved CSIRO, Bushfires NT, the Australian Greenhouse Office, NT Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, and the West Australian Department of Land Information. It should be noted that the Tropical Savanna CRC monitored and reported on greenhouse gas emissions during the agreement.

Early season patchy burns were implemented across the landscape to better protect the Arnhem Land plateau from the wild fires that occur later in the year. These break up the fuel availability for the most destructive fires. Changing the fire routine from one dominated by late Dry Season fires to one that is dominated by early Dry Season fires means less of the landscape is burned each year and results in a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Patchy grass fires mean fewer greenhouse gases than wild fires because the latter also engulf larger fuel loads such as savannah land trees. This strategy has a tremendous success rate. So far, the WALFA scheme has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 256 000 tonnes of carbon dioxide, double its initial target.

To mark this outstanding achievement, on 21 August this year, the project team was awarded a Eureka Prize in the inaugural category of Innovative Solutions to Climate Change. The Australian Museum Eureka Prize is Australia's premier award for outstanding science projects. Presented annually by the Australian Museum, the prizes reward excellence in the fields of research and innovation, science leadership, school science and science journalism and communication. This is a well deserved recognition of the workmanship undertaken by the WALFA project team.

I extend my congratulations to the project's leader, Jeremy Russell-Smith. He is a fire ecologist with the Cooperative Research Centre

and Bushfires Council of the NT; Mr Peter Cooke of the Wardekken Land Management Ltd and traditional owner, Lofty Bardayal Nadjamerrek AO. The project involved many other traditional owners and indigenous rangers, as well as government agencies and various groups. Everyone involved is to be congratulated for their successful commitment to this demanding project.

As a result of this project, the Territory government has improved its understanding of greenhouse gas emissions from savannah land bushfires. There is now an established methodology to estimating emissions from burning, crucial for assessing the impact of fire management practices. This is a great outcome for fire management in the Territory and clearly helps in Australia's fight against global warming.

Management of fire is essential for the Territory as we average 16 days per year of extreme fire weather. Last year, we had 35 days during which conditions warranted the declaration of a total fire ban. So far this year, we have declared 23 fire ban days. That is, 23 days when conditions were so bad that bushfires would be almost impossible to stop.

The ongoing cooperative work by Bushfires NT, the Tropical Savannah Cooperative Research Centre and CSIRO recognises that community engagement is a key to obtaining multiple benefits for a fire management strategy. Better fire management across the Territory landscape not only offers significant greenhouse gas reductions but it has important biodiversity benefits as well as reducing the smoke haze problem that is a daily part of Territory life during our Dry Season.

I want now to talk about the local volunteer brigades in my electorate. Many of the people involved in these organisations, which are volunteer organisations, do not want to be named as the minister said, but I would still like to recognise the ongoing contribution of those on the front line fighting the fires, and some of those behind the operation who are the back ups and always willing to pitch in and help.

The minister has already said that there are about 450 volunteers in 21 Volunteer Bushfire Brigades, with many of them working for 10 weeks or more a year on fire management. They do it for the satisfaction that comes from knowing they are making a difference in a difficult situation in their own communities.

I would like to specifically talk about a couple of the brigades and I will start with the Beatrice Hill Brigade where the Captain is John Gosen and the Deputy Captain is Sonia Wiffen. It is a great team which has recently been fighting fires in the Adelaide River, McKinlay and Wildman River

areas. They are dedicated to their main job of protecting infrastructure, but have told me that the heartbreaking part of fire fighting is that many of them are lit by an irresponsible minority. The member for Katherine spoke about that and I support her condemnation of the people who deliberately light fires. It is the scourge of the Territory and our volunteers have to bear the brunt of that.

The Beatrice Hill Brigade is a big part of the community. It is a more isolated part of the rural area. Aside from fire fighting duties, this community group is the main organiser of the annual Christmas and Territory Day celebrations as well as other events such as supporting the local women's netball team.

In my own area, the Cox Peninsula Brigade is captained by Ray Nichols and his deputy Geoff South. When I spoke to Geoff, he wanted to highlight the fact that fighting fires is a team effort, and that applies right across the board. The people in the front line fighting fire cannot do so without the back up team on the radios and those bringing in the water and other supplies. It is essential to maintaining a properly organised brigade.

Every brigade has a time when people must move on and retire. One couple from Berry Springs is Ron and Phyllis Thomas. They are stalwarts of that brigade and I have already given some adjournment speeches on those two great fire fighters. For the moment I will just say that we are all very sad to see them get to a point that they have to retire. I know that Ron still has the heart in it, but he knows his time has come, and he is handing over the reins, most appropriately. He and his team have been upgrading their new fire shed which is the old Berry Springs hardware store. They put in new works there with the benefit of grants they receive from the Territory and the Commonwealth, and they purchased some equipment with these grants. They are doing a great job and, combining with the nearby brigades, it is very much a cooperative team approach.

At Lambells Lagoon, the guys like to be thought of in regards to their members. The captain, Michael Delis, is known for his diplomacy and delegation skills; Davo McLachlan for giving, not only to his brigade, but also to other fire-related organisations such as the Bushfire Volunteers Association and the Vernon Regional Committee. Steven Solomon is appreciated for his lateral thinking and mechanical genius in keeping their vehicles in top working order within a tight budget. Kym McLachlan for her diligence in recordkeeping and accounts payable, and all the members, partners and friends for refreshments and putting up with the abovementioned

volunteers who give up so much of their own time normally spent with their families.

To those not mentioned, for filling in when regulars are unable to attend, that group at Lambells Lagoon are indebted. They are also indebted to all the other brigades who have helped when the fires have hit the proverbial fan and become almost uncontrollable. Without the combined help of neighbouring brigades, their firefighting would be impossible and they would like to pass on their gratitude to these other brigades.

Livingstone Brigade is in the member for Daly's electorate. I would like to commend the outstanding effort of 244 hours clocked up by Max Kennon, and Louie King clocked up 383 hours. I am sure the member for Daly will speak more on that. They help out in brigades in my electorate, such as Berry Springs, and Elizabeth River at Noonamah.

The Elizabeth Valley Group Captain is Dianne Tynan, and her deputy is Geoff Baker. You have heard that Dianne has spent 244 hours on fires, as the minister mentioned, and it has been non-stop since before 1984 when she became the brigade captain. Dianne said she and her partner, Mick Tynan, are station people and have always been involved in firefighting. They have continued this tradition with their own children; Jason has been helping since he was 13 years old, and also their daughter, Charmaine, is actively involved. Charmaine and Jason are now in their 30's and very experienced in all facets of firefighting. Paul Pokorny is always out there together with the treasurer, Ken Baulch and Jason Moon. Behind the scenes are Jenny Joffaume as secretary and Jean Baker.

The Koolpinyah Brigade is a fire and emergency brigade also in the rural area. The captain is Lou Cowan and the vice-captain is Steven Say. The crew is Fran Say and Eileen Cowan. Fundraisers for that group are Graham and Beth Stacey. As you can see, that is a real family-orientated brigade. They are a group which is also involved in community projects and often help community members in need. There were a couple of cases they told me about where people, nothing to do with fires, but they had very much a need in the rural area, and that group got together because they are a coordinated group, and they helped out and have been fabulous members of the community.

At the Humpty Doo Brigade, the captain is Ted Murphy, who is also involved in the Humpty Doo School Council and is president of that organisation as well. The vice captain is Damien Shore, and the crew is Tony Anderson, Vanessa Turner, Cameron Burrows, Trevor Albert and

Brian Arantz, Damian Bradley, Mick Conway, Des Purdue and Jason O'Mahony. Jason is just 18 years old and is the son of Anne O'Mahony, the ex-Nelson/Goyder member of our ALP branch, and she is along Strangways Road. They are all good rural people. Involved in fundraising is Sue Adams and Peppi Pratt. Sue has been the captain for 12 years, and Peppi was a member for the same length of time. They both recently retired but they are still actively involved with the brigade. They are another group who always get involved in community events. They regularly hold a Christmas hamper raffle, which I am always pleased to support as far as making up some book vouchers. They are a very popular part of the approach to Christmas and they are always at the Humpty Doo shops selling their raffle tickets.

I was talking to Damien Parker from the Humpty Doo's regular brigade and he was telling me that two of the volunteers have gone on to be involved in full-time firefighting in the last intake. He is very proud of Jim Dalton and Scotty Hansen.

The Virginia and Bees Creek brigades are now combined and Sandy Griffin is the Captain. I must make special mention of that particular brigade, as they raised my awareness strongly mid-last year about the volunteers ...

Ms CARNEY: Mr Deputy Speaker, I move an extension of time for the member for Goyder to complete his remarks, pursuant to Standing Order 77.

Motion agreed to.

Mr WARREN: Thank you, member for Araluen.

Lesley Dias raised my awareness that the brigade there was suffering from loss of support. She thought it was something we could get involved with, as far as promoting the Volunteer Fire Service in the rural area. I was pleased to get involved with that. I suggested to the Bushfires Council and the Emergency Services that, if they put together a brochure promoting the volunteer service in the rural area with some details, and both groups got together on that, I would advertise it and put an insert into my newsletter as well as running a story on volunteers. I did that and it was a good combined effort between a local volunteer group and a local member. The document I have here was inserted into my newsletter. On the front, it talks about becoming a volunteer and encouraging people to do so; what is involved in training and what volunteer firefighters do. On the back is 'How do I become a volunteer', and we have included there the Bushfires NT and the Fire and Rescue Service telephone numbers, and maps of the areas they cover.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table the document.

Leave granted.

Mr WARREN: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. It is an important document and it should be reported in the *Parliamentary Record*, as I was impressed with what they put together.

I acknowledge the work of a person I have mentioned before in this House; that is, Patrick Skewes, the Hazard Abatement Officer with the Fire and Emergency Services. Patrick is collaborating on the Bushfires NT and gamba grass issues, and fire management workshops for the rural dwellers. He is also involved in nationally accredited training for firefighter members involved in the team which is preparing improved and up-to-date fire plans for property in the Territory. Patrick also advises on the availability of equipment in our rural community in an effort to improve responsiveness, and assists in the implementation of new protocols for fire bans, including the heightened alert for firefighters and the use of our new aerial water bomber, the air tractor, which is our newest weapon in the fight against wildfires.

Along with my personal thanks, I want to make a plea for people in the rural community - the whole of the Territory as a matter of fact - to report all sightings of irresponsible fire lighting to Police or Emergency Services. Reports they make may be the last piece of evidence which is needed to make a conviction. I have spoken before, as has the member for Katherine, about the illegal minority group which is causing heartache by deliberately lighting fires for the thrill of it. I do not understand why people would do that but, in any case, I encourage people to report such instances. There are now significant penalties for those convicted for causing fires. However, it is difficult to convict people without significant evidence. It is your responsibility, as a local person in the Territory, if you see someone lighting a fire, to report it. Take down the number of the vehicle if you have access to that and can see what the vehicle is, otherwise report it to the nearest police station as soon as you can.

I also urge all rural people to ensure they keep their firebreaks maintained. It plays a very important part. It sometimes disappoints me when I am doorknocking and I meet people who complain about being humbugged to clear their firebreaks. As a politician, I should be showing empathy to my constituents, but I have much more empathy with the fire fighters who risk their lives and often, in difficult circumstances, where people have not put their breaks in. I have no compunction about bringing people to task in the rural area and just reminding them that they live in

a rural area, there are responsibilities and fire breaks are a big part of that and the volunteers risk their lives for that. Their neighbours risk their lives. They need a responsible attitude.

A positive move has been the reinforcement of section 47 of the *Bushfires Act*, following a 10 year education campaign. Section 47 provides for Bushfires NT to issue bushfire infringement notices to enforce the construction of fire breaks. In 2005, there were 8000 or so properties in the Darwin rural area; 3045 were inspected and of these, 12 areas were found to be non-compliant. I remind the House that the prosecution rate so far has been 100%. Excellent!

Fire mapping is carried out in the Darwin rural area using the final resolution Landsat imagery. This work provides a framework for looking at the extent of bushfires where they are occurring, how often they occur in specific areas, and the seasonal differences in bushfires which occur. This is, as I mentioned earlier, the basis for the fire management planning and greenhouse gas emission estimation in the west Arnhem Land area, as part of that project I mentioned before in west Arnhem Land. I encourage the government to look at expending more on this work. This is very exciting stuff. As a person of science, I find it very exciting that we are taking the innovative approaches using science and traditional knowledge. We do things in a unique way here, but it is very important that we take things forward in this way.

On that note I will conclude my statement in support of the minister. It is a very important statement and it is good to recognise many of our local volunteers and the people who have put in those countless hours of volunteering - people who work tirelessly, unrewarded in many respects, to protect their neighbours' properties. That is the height of good community compassion. It really restores my faith in humanity when people are out there working very hard to protect other people's properties and other people's livelihoods because they care.

Ms CARNEY (Opposition Leader): Mr Deputy Speaker, I thank the minister for her statement. As the minister has said, and also the member for Goyder, this is a serious issue that affects the lives of many people. As the minister said in her statement, it is one of the dominant features of the Territory. At this time of year when we see the smoke decreasing around the Top End, that is a reminder to us and it does affect in quite different ways, the length and breadth of the Territory.

I was interested to see in the statement that, on average, 15 million ha of the Territory is burned each year and the comparison is more than two

Tasmanias – good comparison. That is an awful lot of stuff that is burnt and of course, as you have indicated, minister, unfortunately, some of it deliberately.

I recall a debate – it would have been about two years ago now – about the Bushfires Bill and the CLP and the ALP differed in terms of a penalty and some other changes to the act. There was, I recall, a common view that we as a parliament, we as politicians, need to be vigilant in terms of the issue generally. It does affect, often directly, often indirectly, our constituents and our community looks to us as their politicians for leadership on this issue. It is a good statement and it is a timely reminder of the damage that bushfires do in the Territory.

I was going to go through some of your statement, and I know the member for Katherine went through some of it and the member for Goyder's contribution was useful as well. There were a couple of things I wanted to acknowledge. Minister, you said in addition to homes, there has been substantial investment in horticulture in the region and you outlined the growth of horticulture and the fact is that we do not want to lose any or part of our horticultural industry to fire. Therefore, there are responsibilities that people in rural areas and people who live close to horticultural areas have in relation to being ever-vigilant about fires.

People in rural communities and the rural area south of Darwin, in particular, are pretty vigilant, but I think they need more reminding. I note that there is the campaign, the 5 Rs, which is commendable. I note that the minister referred to working with ABC local radio, Bushfires NT and working closely with staff from Taminmin High School. I would have liked some details about what that work involved. Perhaps in your reply you would be good enough to elaborate on that. Certainly from the paragraph, it sounded as though they are doing something interesting, but I am not entirely sure that it is clear from the statement what exactly that is. I am pleased to see that government is working to 'develop fire awareness education more generally'. I would like to have known a little more about that; what sort of cost allocation has been provided and the nature of that education campaign because they were absent from the statement.

References throughout the statement to volunteers were most welcome. I note that you have named many volunteers and brigades throughout the statement. That is great. All of us know people who volunteer in this capacity and thank God they do. It is a dangerous pursuit. I am not sure that we have lost anyone in the Territory in recent times at least, but as Australians, every summer, wherever we are, we are often confronted by horrific stories on our

television news services that outline death and destruction. It is an issue about which all Australians are very conscious, but there certainly does need to be, and I would say nationally, too, a greater awareness. My observation, casual though it might be, is that in other states, there is always the warning about a month before summer. You see a couple of advertisements on television, but, frankly, you would have thought that perhaps a more consistent or constant education campaign might achieve better results.

People who light fires are absolute scumbags. I say that for many reasons, but one of them is less obvious. I have three brothers. My eldest brother has been a volunteer fire fighter for as long as I can remember. He lives in a rural area in Victoria and he and his family are often, increasingly every summer, wherever they are, inconvenienced because Michael has to be called back. He goes because of a sense of duty. He goes to fight the fires and puts himself at great risk. This is something of a personal digression, but I should make it because in the context of this, it is quite interesting. He is an aircraft engineer. He is a pilot. He does all sorts of things in the aviation industry. What he also does in his spare time is he has gone from an on-the-ground volunteer fire fighter to be an air attack supervisor through the State Aviation Unit in Victoria.

When I received this statement, I rang my brother. I never really have any idea where he is at any given time. He was in America so I woke him up, and he was not all that happy about that, but I asked some questions about the statement. I asked him in particular about the aerial water bomber and the Air Tractor 802 and, boy, did I learn all about the Air Tractor 802. It was also an opportunity to say, and I doubt that I will ever repeat it in the parliament, that my brother works with Elvis. That is, he goes up in his capacity as an air attack supervisor, and when Elvis and the big aerial bombers go up, he is in the helicopter next to it, liaising and managing the instructions from those on the ground who can identify where to bomb, how much, and other intricate details. He then conveys that to the guys who are flying Elvis. The helicopter flies quite close to the huge aerial bomber.

Elvis drops 9000 litres in one hit. The Air Tractor 802, I am told, drops 3000 litres in one hit. That amounts to three tonnes of water, so that is an enormous amount of water. My point is this: that these wonderful things, aerial water bombers, Elvis is the most famous one, and air tractors, are valuable firefighting tools.

I note there is a reference to training. I am advised that the training is very specific, and that the Air Tractor 802 is basically a crop dusting aircraft, but it can do what is called 'streaming

drops'. In the Territory, he says they are particularly suited for this sort of stuff, and I reckon he would know. In terms of an aerial water bomber such as Elvis, apparently that sort of aerial water bomber is much more effective than the traditional helicopters which, although they can water bomb quite specifically, are significantly slower than the bigger aircraft. Of course, in the Territory, given the distances we travel, obviously the big aerial water bombers are desirable and probably preferable.

I am pleased about the Air Tractor 802. I even got a run down from the company of the contractual obligations which would apply to various governments and so on. I suggested that I perhaps did not need that information, however, you get someone talking about something they know and they are off and racing.

I am pleased to see the aerial water bomber and the Air Tractor 802 in the Territory. I hope the Air Tractor 802 is going to be here – I assume you probably have a five or 10 year lease or something like that, a couple of years, maybe, minimum?

Ms Lawrie: They are on a trial from South Australia.

Ms CARNEY: On trial, okay. Well, I am sure that those people who work with it will speak very highly of its effectiveness. Although, you said in your statement that we have 16 days of extreme fire weather in the Territory, we hope that on those 16 days in particular that there are no fires, but, of course, there are always going to be fires in the Territory. It might have been the member for Katherine, or the member for Goyder, as you did too, minister, who talked about the role of the Northern Land Council and indigenous people who work in the area. Let us look at the West Arnhem Fire Management Agreement, acknowledged as a world first project, and acknowledged as a collaborative effort. It is collaborative because it involves the input of landowners - in this case, traditional owners from West Arnhem Land and others.

Aboriginal people have done extremely well with fires, everybody knows, since just about the beginning of time, and there are valuable lessons to be learnt. It is great to see that there is ongoing research. Again, I was interested that there was no money or financial allocation provided in the statement. There may well be money from the Commonwealth, I do not know, but, it would be good if the minister could indicate how much money, if any, the Territory contributes to that research, because research has to be ongoing, and it has to be diverse.

The statement is comprehensive in the sense that you refer to a number of issues, a number of people, and a number of challenges. People have said to me over the years that there is a view that the Bushfires NT - the old Bushfires Council – is underfunded. I encourage the minister, based on the statement, to do what she can as a responsible minister to ensure that the best shot is given to not only maintaining their funding but, in fact, increasing it.

For all of those volunteers who put themselves at risk - of course, it has ramifications for the families and friends as well - thank you. I join with other members to thank them very sincerely for what they do. I am not sure that I could do it. It takes a particular type of person to tackle firefighting. I know how specialised it is. I also know that there is a lot of grunt work involved. However, if I lived on a rural block - and I do not, but if I did - I would like to think that I would be able to do what I could. I can only do what I can if I am educated about it, and that then gets back to ensuring, as a government, that this government does what it can to maximise the level of education, particularly for children.

One wonders whether it might be a good idea before bushfire season to get some materials into schools to tell kids not only the risks of fire but, quite frankly, to almost scare them to death by telling them about the penalties for lighting fires. I am not sure, but my guess is that some parents do not talk to their kids about this stuff. They should, and the government has a responsibility to keep up an education campaign.

With those comments, and on the basis of some quite interesting information I received from Big Brother, I am happy to provide you with a briefing at any time, minister, if you need to know the guts of the Air Tractor 802. Any other details, let me know. In fact, I am happy to give you his number.

Mr HAMPTON (Stuart): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I congratulate the minister on bringing forward this statement on bushfires. It is a very timely statement, given the fact that we are now coming into the bushfire season. I also acknowledge other speakers. There have been some great contributions in the House today from other members. I acknowledge the great work done by the staff within the Department of Natural Resources, Environment and the Arts, the minister's department. They are doing some great work, particularly in Alice Springs and through our regional centres as well.

When we talk about bushfires, there are two parts to it, in my mind. One is acknowledging my traditional heritage, particularly the Warlpiri people through the Warlpiri Tanami lands, and our

traditional use of bushfires through ceremonies, regeneration of our lands, hunting particular animals, but also for regrowth, particularly the bush foods that Warlpiri people have relied upon over many thousands of years. The bush tomato, the *Akatjorra*, needs fire to drop the seed and regenerate, and is one example of how my people have used fire to survive off the land in the early days, and continue to do so today. A very important part of ceremonies in my Warlpiri land is the fire ceremony; it is a significant ceremony.

That also brings it challenges as well. We still have many indigenous people throughout the Northern Territory continuing to practice burning off country. However, the Territory has grown. We now have other industries and other land users out there who rely on the land and, often, these bushfires that may have been lit by indigenous people travelling through country, also bring about some challenges in controlling it. I certainly have a lot of respect for the traditional use of bushfire and the knowledge that traditional Aboriginal Territorians have, however, with that we need to acknowledge other land users in the Northern Territory; pastoralists, tourists, and the environment as well.

I had the pleasure recently of visiting the Bushfire Council in Alice Springs and meeting Rod Cantlay, the Senior Fire Control Officer of the Southern Region. I had a good time going through the office and meeting other staff and finding out a bit more about what they do, and having a look around the workshop and facilities they have. Listening to them and the challenges they face with the upcoming bushfire season, there are many challenges. The member for Araluen mentioned the importance of the equipment our bush fighters rely on.

That was one of the issues raised with me in Alice Springs through the Bushfire Council. They rely heavily on communication, and given all the technology we have now, satellite phones, the Internet, etcetera, one of the basic pieces of infrastructure they still rely on is the old radio. It is interesting that it is probably still one of the most reliable sources of communication for them, and something they rely heavily on. It is worth noting that radio procedures for bush fighters throughout the region, and the brigades, is vital for them. We can talk about the vehicles which are vitally important, however, the old radio communication is still one of the most reliable sources of communication.

The member for Araluen mentioned the aerial bombers which we now have in the Northern Territory. Another vital piece of equipment for remote communities is the old fire fighting trailer. The Centre for Appropriate Technology in Alice Springs makes them now and this could be further

explored in terms of the fire fighting trailers. I do not know if there is a program for communities, or a grant which they can apply for to get the trailers, but even for pastoralists it is a vital piece of equipment in remote Central Australia in particular. There are a few models around. The one which the Centre for Appropriate Technology is currently making has some issues surrounding it, but I acknowledge that important piece of equipment.

The Toyota Tray Tops - Rod showed me one of the vehicles there, and there are some concerns about the amount of weight which is placed on the tray tops which is the only reliable vehicle they have. When you look at the equipment they have on the back of them, they are becoming increasingly heavy and something which is worth looking at into the future is other types of vehicles which may be more suitable to hold the equipment and water, and which provides more safety for our fire fighter workers and volunteers.

I understand there are approximately 20 volunteers in Alice Springs, and for the Southern Region, with Alice Springs being its base, that is not many. It would be great to see a drive within the community to get more volunteers involved in that type of work as it is a vital area of our community. I can recall two years ago, perhaps longer, some serious fires through some of the pastoral properties around Alice Springs, and they called on volunteers to assist with those fires. Volunteers are an important part of the bushfire sector in the Northern Territory. I understand there are 21 volunteer bushfire brigades, and when you look at the area they are servicing, 100 000 km² or more, it really stretches our volunteers to the limit.

One area I touched on at the outset was the combination of traditional fire making but also the contemporary issues that it presents. I would like to see more done in the area of education. Through the CLC, the Rose report, there is mention of work between the Central Land Council, traditional owners and the Bushfire Council, but there is room for more education between those groups. There are vast amounts of Aboriginal freehold land and mixed in with that are pastoral leases. With the number of fires we have, it is important that education of indigenous communities, traditional owners as well as Bushfire Council workers and volunteers happens.

One area that is worthy of note is the Indigenous Protected Areas Program through the Commonwealth government. I was pleased to go to the launch of the Northern Tanami Indigenous Protected Areas earlier this year with Warren Snowdon, the member for Lingiari. I would like to quote Billy Bunter, one of the Gurindji and Warlpiri

elders, at the Indigenous Protected Areas launch at Lajamanu. He said that the indigenous Protected Areas program is helping create good jobs like rangers to take care of country:

The Indigenous Protected Areas Program is giving young people opportunities day by day. Young people really enjoy working on the Indigenous Protected Area, and old people enjoy going out with them. Women really enjoy taking children out for stories.

The Indigenous Protected Areas Program, or IPA, of the Northern Tanami one covers around 40 000 km² and is the second largest in Australia. It is centred around Lajamanu, and provides locals at Lajamanu, young Warlpiri men, particularly the Wulain Rangers through the Wulain Resource Centre, real jobs which keep them interested and connected to country and traditional ways of managing the land. One of those ways is controlling traditional burn-offs as well as using contemporary western land management methods.

The IPA is a worthy program and presents many of opportunities to assist in management of bushfires in remote communities. I was pleased to hear the recent announcement by the federal Labor Party about 300 more rangers for communities in the Northern Territory. Up to 300 rangers is significant and I can see areas where our remote communities in the Northern Territory can tap into that policy in the future.

I want to acknowledge some of the Bushfire Council people in Katherine. They also do a lot of work in the Victoria River district within my electorate. Adrian Creighton is with the Bushfire Council in Katherine and the Katherine volunteers in the brigade. As we all know, the bushfire season is well and truly under way and it is important that we reflect on the many hours that volunteers contribute to protecting the lives and property of Territorians. The Katherine area has had its fair share of fires already this season; the bushfires at the Primary Industries research station at Uralla Road, Gorge Road, CSR and the quarry.

In Katherine, the volunteer bushfire brigade members diligently fight fires to protect the community and they are unpaid. They work during the weekends, leave work to attend fires and conduct burn offs to lessen the risk of a bushfire. We would be in a lot of trouble without them.

With increasing risk of fires at this time of the year, fire bans are increasingly used as a tool to reduce the risk of disasters happening. This time of the year, a few factors come into play which make it a prime time for fires. The weather dries

out grasses, making them highly combustible, there is a lack of humidity in the air and, importantly, strong winds, which are often variable and less predictable than at other times of the year. This wind factor can make for difficult firefighting conditions where fire fronts can change with no notice.

There were four volunteer bushfire brigade members and fire and rescue workers out at Uralla Road helping locals defend their homes in the last weekend of September. Many residents had to leave their homes. The Katherine bushfires region extends from the north at Edith Farms to the south, past VRD to the Gulf of Woollogorang. This is an enormous area to coordinate and implement fire control operations.

Bushfires NT work with pastoralists and other landholders to implement fire mitigation, aerial control burning, and assist in firefighting. The Katherine Volunteer Brigade does controlled burning and mitigation before the fire season starts, so there is plenty of work before the fire season.

Fires out in the VRD, at Bradshaw, Tanami and Stuart Plateau are, thankfully, burning out, but are still being closely monitored. Currently, the Dungowan Station is under threat and being watched closely by Bushfires NT, and Newcastle Waters Station. Fires at Scott Creek and Manbulloo are now getting under control, pastoralists and block owners have been vigilant with fire fighting. It was pleasing to note that, in recent Katherine fires, many block owners had their own firefighting equipment to augment the brigades.

Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade has 30 members, 20 of whom are very active. A few people for special mention are Bob Wright, who is the Captain, and Jane Murphy, who is the Communications Officer. Also, Warwick Jenkins who has retired from the firefighting area, but most importantly, now provides the everyday fire weather report, an enormously important job, often overlooked, notifying everybody on the radio, the fire weather situation each day. Thank you to Warwick as well.

One of the interesting things that I came across while visiting the Bushfire Council in Alice Springs was the aerial map on the Internet. It is the North Australia Fire Internet website. I had a look on that particular satellite website with Rod Cantlay, the Senior Fire Control Officer in the Southern Region. The information there is amazing; you can go back years and years, looking at where fires have occurred and the scarring that is still left on the country. It can also show you different colours within the map. It gives you an idea where the fires were over certain

parts of the year, right up to current fires. It gives you the latest information on bushfires, where they are active, to years ago, where they were and the scarring still happens to be there and is caught on the satellite image. The other important thing with the satellite image is the wind - how much wind is out there, and which direction it is going. This allows the bushfire council people in Alice Springs or in Katherine to contact pastoralists or Aboriginal communities if there is a real threat to property or lives. It is a very useful tool that our bushfire council members and workers are using today.

As I said previously, there is the big fire currently through the Tanami, up past Renner Springs, across as far west as Lajamanu, through the VRD area. This is a very significant fire. Rod said to me that he did have a call recently from people up at Yuendumu. They could see the smoke in the distance. I suppose they thought it was up near the Mt Theo petrol sniffing homeland outstation, so they rang Rod for the latest information. Rod was able to tell them very quickly by looking on the satellite map. He told them the wind was blowing in the opposite direction, so that fire may be in the vicinity but due to the winds in that area, it was going to blow away from the outstation, so there was no threat to the outstation and to people's lives. That is how effective the satellite image system is. It is a very useful tool. As I said, on one end you have the old communication, the old radio, that they used, but you have the latest information technology through the satellite image, both of which are very effective.

The member for Goyder talked about the early days and his experiences living in the country when he was a young lad. That brought back memories of my time in Adelaide, recalling the really bad fires we had in the Adelaide Hills – the Ash Wednesday fires that caused so much damage to property and lives. Also, the Canberra bushfires a couple of years ago really did some damage. It just shows how destructive fires can be. I recall the bushfires in California a few years ago, and how Australian bush firefighters were called in to help with those bushfires. That speaks volumes for our bush firefighters in Australia and the respect they have throughout the world.

In conclusion, Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank all those people who work in the bushfire councils, the volunteers, particularly in Alice Springs, Central Australia, Katherine and the VRD region. I acknowledge the minister for bringing this statement forward.

Mr KNIGHT (Daly): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I support the minister's statement on the bushfire brigades and the councils. I cannot say enough about these volunteers. I have become more intimate with the various brigades around my

electorate over the last few years, and am struck by the courage and the commitment of these volunteers. In my electorate, we have several different regions: the Arafura region, which stretches outside of the Darwin rural area; the Vernon region, which is basically around the Darwin rural and Coomalie area; the VRD region; and the Katherine region. They encapsulate several brigades that I have had a bit to do with.

In the Arafura region is the Daly River Volunteer Bushfires Brigade. Brian Muir is a great bloke. He is semi-retired, I would say, and keeps an eye out down that way and keeps the equipment in very good order, and has done so for quite some time. The Douglas Daly Volunteer Brigade is one that is very active. With the type of operations they have in the Douglas Daly, any fires are very concerning for fodder and livestock. They have suffered some quite significant fires in recent times. One stupid, deliberate act of some visitors who set fire to some stored hay not only started off that fire but led to more destruction across that region.

In the Vernon region, I have the Acacia Hills, Batchelor, Adelaide River and Tortilla Brigades, the Beatrice Hill, Berry Springs, Cox Peninsula, Darwin River, Dundee, Livingstone, Manton and Milne. All those brigades do a great deal of work.

The rural area is the most significant part because it is changing. The rural area is growing. There are more subdivisions going in, more expensive homes, and bigger families living there. There are younger children. People are moving into that area in droves which is putting pressure on the brigades to protect life and property. It is also about getting new people on board, being aware of the fire and also being part of the community and how fires are treated in those areas. I will go on to those a little later.

There is a large market garden presence in the rural areas. We have many smaller 20 acre blocks where they have horticulture production and there are larger blocks. There are many intensive cattle finishing-off properties in the north which, when they are occupied, have much valuable stock onsite. A fire out there is of huge concern. There have been descriptions of the number of fires that have occurred and how much was burnt, and it is very significant. Unfortunately, over the last few years there have been a number of fires that I have become all too aware of. There were some recent fires in the Acacia Hills and Howard River areas. The resources of the Acacia Hills bushfires included a total of 378 volunteer hours. That was an incredible amount of work done over quite some days. They had only three grass fire units and poured over 3000 litres of water on to that particular fire. The Howard River bushfire saw a total of six grass fire units and 84

volunteer hours committed to that. That is a huge effort from the community, putting their lives on the line.

The Acacia Hills fire ripped through that area. Unfortunately, the captain of the Acacia Hills brigade was overseas and they could not save his house. There was a mango plantation which was basically burnt to the ground and the fire ripped through a number of properties in the Whitstone Road area. One of those people was Maureen Coleman. Maureen was in Alice Springs at that time but she got wind of it. Her husband was in town and got the word from the brigade. He raced back out of town to try to save his property because their son was at home. I visited their house shortly after the fire had gone through. It was amazing. It was something out of a movie; trees were blackened and there was not a blade of grass or any sort of tree saved and quite dangerous with the trees falling. Maureen, after that event, organised a meeting on Whitstone Road - I will talk a bit about that later - and she certainly galvanised that community. That brigade is looking for assistance and we hope to assist them in that area.

I talked about people coming into the rural area from urban areas and perhaps interstate. For the areas outside of Darwin and Palmerston, basically the obligation under the *Bushfires Act* is on the property owner. You have to control your own fire on your property; that is the obligation you have. It becomes incumbent on property owners to not only look after their own property but to also stop fires which start or pass through their property from continuing on to other properties. That is the difference and that was why the bushfires brigades were established. They established regional committees and several bushfires brigades as separate entities and the government funds them.

It is worthwhile noting that this government has doubled the funding of the bushfires brigades, which is great. It is amazing to think that these brigades operated on half the money they get now. They struggle from time to time. They do things on a bit of a shoe string. Private vehicles are used. If damage is caused - you can go out fighting fire and stake your tyre which is about \$250 worth of damage. The brigades receive a certain amount of money and, once that runs out, they have to stump it up themselves. It is not only a physical commitment, but also a financial one. That is where the fire approach in the rural area and the rest of the Northern Territory is different from the urban centres. You have to be part of it, and that is why there is an obligation for property owners to be part of the volunteer brigade and make themselves aware of what they are doing.

There are over 450 volunteers and 21 volunteer brigades across the Territory; that is a huge commitment. Last year, we had a meeting at Berry Springs and a fire had started at Fly Creek. A ride-on mower had clipped a rock and a spark had been ignited, and there were heavy winds. That fire raged for two or three days, and one of the brigade captains came to the meeting. He had not slept for over 24 hours and he had soot all over him. He had missed out on two days of paid work. He had been fighting this fire. That is an amazing commitment on his part.

The minister talked about the COAG approach with the 5 Rs, and I support those: research, risk modification, readiness, response, and recovery. What I want to emphasise came out of the meeting at Acacia Hills organised by Maureen Coleman, who was supported by other volunteers who came along and cooked breakfast, which was a nice thing for them to do. It was on a Sunday, and it was well supported by the community. Some people were angry about what happened; why didn't the volunteers do more work. They were volunteers and it seems funny to put the obligation on volunteers when many of those people were not members themselves.

Jeremy Russell-Smith was at the meeting and talked about fire mitigation. There is a belief that firebreaks are actually fire breaks. They are really fire-access tracks. What we saw in Acacia Hills was that the fire jumped 30 m, 40 m, 50 m. It lit up trees 100 m ahead of it. There were strong winds, but not overly so. People need to be aware that the firebreak you put in can do something in a small fire, but it will not stop a decent fire. The real impetus that came out of the meeting was that people need to reduce fuel loads on their properties. There needs to be more planning and education about that.

It is no use blaming the bushfire brigade, or people for not putting in firebreaks if you have a significant fuel load on your property. The only reason your place will burn is if you have a decent fuel load upon it. There needs to be an awareness of the need to reduce the fuel load. By doing this, you will slow the fire, there will be less impact on your property, and it will stop the fire continuing. It will slow it down from getting to the next property, and will give the bushfire brigade a chance to do their work to put it out. Awareness and education is a big part of that and what has been committed to by the bushfires brigade and the headquarters, by Steve Sutton and Andrew Turner, who were also at that meeting, is that when the season is over, through late-November/December, there will be some planning sessions and workshops to educate people about what they can do.

We are coming to the Wet Season and fires are not in people's minds. We are also drifting off to Christmas and people do not really engage. Then, when we get to the next fire season, we have the problem. I hope, through those planning sessions, people will become more aware because if everybody comes on board, it will certainly ease those fires in those areas.

It is good to see that the department is working with the schools. Children are sometimes the best teachers, especially of parents. Taminmin is a great school to be doing that advertisement. It is certainly in that rural focus at the moment. I look forward to seeing some results of that. I must say that ABC radio has been excellent and they are very willing to receive calls from people around the rural area who call in fires and keep things updated. When there is a response from a brigade or from headquarters, they keep people informed about what is going on. I was in that area on Monday night and there was the Girraween fire which closed the highway. There were regular reports on the radio. It is great to see that happening.

I have mentioned the Batchelor headquarters, which this government, as the minister mentioned, put in \$229 000. For the bushfires brigades which have struggled for years to get some recognition, and some decent funding, it was a significant day. We had many volunteers at the opening. I was there with the minister, Marion Scrymgour. We did the opening together and people were very excited about it. It was some sort of commitment. They had worked out of some deteriorating demountables for many years. It was a great day.

The comments of the Leader of the Opposition, reported from Alice Springs, were disappointing. She said she was disgusted that the people of Batchelor, the volunteers across the Northern Territory, who use the Batchelor headquarters, had that facility financially committed to by this government. That is unfortunate. I hope that the Leader of the Opposition pays a bit more attention to the work of the bushfire brigades and gives them some sort of recognition.

One of the other areas that did get some additional funding this year was the Air Tractor, which we have all talked about. I was there when the Air Tractor was launched. They had a test flight and did a few runs up and down the airstrip at Batchelor dropping different loads. They can alter the hoppers to do long, thin loads, or do one big dump of foam, so it was very, very impressive.

I have mentioned that that particular aircraft flew from Adelaide to Batchelor, and when it arrived in Batchelor it still had a full tank of fuel. The hoppers can hold fuel as well, and they pump the fuel back into the main tank, so it had 3000

litres of fuel in its belly. I believe the doors are worth something like \$200 000 because of their efficiency. It is great to see this government trying to look at other ways of curbing these fires, slowing them down, getting on to them early, as has been the practice in the southern states. It will be interesting to see how it goes over time. I will continue to lobby for additional funds for the bushfire brigades, as I am sure the member for Goyder will also do. They do great work.

I believe there will be a time where the rural area will grow to a point where we will have to look at the act again, where we may need to, into the future, establish some sort of fire station there and some sort of permanent fire brigade which will have to be supported by volunteers but will be a permanent brigade, but that is into the future. I believe that if we can do all these other things with minimising fuel loads, getting people to put in their fire access roads to slow these fires down, and just general education about how people are looking after their blocks, it will go a long way.

Congratulations to the bushfires brigades and the Bushfires Council in general. Congratulations to the minister for bringing this statement forward, with some recognition of some true heroes in the Northern Territory.

Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I am very pleased to inform the House tonight that Stage 1 of the new Darwin Middle School at Bullocky Point is on track to open for ...

Mr ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: Chief Minister, we had not concluded the minister's statement. The minister was replying. I thought you were speaking in support of it.

Ms Martin: No, no, not at all. They said it was adjournment.

Mr ACTING DEPUTY SPEAKER: We will start again. The minister was most surprised.

Ms LAWRIE (Natural Resources, Environment and Heritage): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I thank the parliament for their bipartisan support for the ministerial statement supporting our bushfire volunteers. It was genuine bipartisan support across the parliament in contributions to the statement, and I welcome that. Everyone who spoke to the statement recognised and acknowledged the enormous effort that our volunteers make in saving lives and property each year. There was some surprise that, this year, the volume and impact of our bushfires in the Territory with, on average, 15 million hectares of the Territory being burnt each year, is more than two Tasmanias. It really is a significant issue for the Territory. All members, in their contribution,

acknowledged the size of the effort that the volunteers undertake each year.

The member for Katherine talked about her personal experience of living in Katherine, an area that is prone to bushfires, and was very supportive of the work of her local brigades.

The member for Goyder acknowledged the role of climate change, and the challenges that means for the Territory. I thank him for his support in my call for a strategic approach to climate change and submissions to come forward to government on that approach. Of course, the approach will be underpinned by the magnificent project undertaken by WAFMA in west Arnhem Land. Several speakers spoke about the WAFMA project in support of the statement.

For the information of the opposition, who raised some questions about WAFMA, I can advise that one of the most significant achievements of WAFMA has been documenting that early Dry Season fires release less greenhouse gases than late Dry Season fires.

The agreement between ConocoPhillips Darwin liquid natural gas plant and the Northern Territory government requires them to abate 100 000 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year. Progress towards this offset is being made by combining modern science with traditional fire management. It is amazing that what is ancient knowledge for one culture is now new knowledge for another.

In relation to the query from the Leader of the Opposition regarding the Taminmin High School project, I can advise her that my agency is working with the SOCE teachers in the school to develop a fire management plan for the Woodside Reserve within the school grounds. This plan is being used as an education experience involving the SOCE students. It provides them with an opportunity to learn how to make fire plans. In addition, the students are working with our ecological researchers mapping and looking at the effects of fire on Top End landscape. Bushfires NT is also having very positive discussions regarding a Bushfires Cadet Scheme through Vocational Education and Training.

In regard to fire training, I can advise that the government has committed \$104 000 to this training. The important thing to note here is that the courses that have been developed have been designed to provide and achieve national accreditation. Further to the Leader of the Opposition's query, I advise that the nature of our education campaign is that we have an interactive web-based system which provides resources for teachers and students which will be distributed to schools next year.

We provide a consistent education campaign. About \$25 000 has been spent on advertising this year alone and, as I advised in my ministerial statement, we are working with the ABC radio to develop community announcements about fire in the Territory. These will be three-minute stories covering Alice Springs and the Darwin and rural area. We are also working with local radio to establish a protocol for access to regular updates about fire when people need it. Ian Mannix of ABC radio and our excellent local producers and broadcasters are working on this.

The Leader of the Opposition advised the Chamber that she woke her brother up in the United States to query him about the aerial solutions we have to fighting fires, and confirmed that the Air Tractor 802 is a very effective fire fighting tool. The 802 is a plane that I saw and I met the pilot; it is on trial from South Australia. It is their off fire season, and it is our on fire season, so it made sense collaboratively with South Australia to trial the Air Tractor 802. It is a computer controlled water release mechanism, and is purpose designed for fire fighting. The 802 has become what is seen as the gold standard worldwide for fixed wing aerial suppression. There is clearly an opportunity for some fires in some parts of Australia for the use of Elvis and we would just keep going bigger and bigger as in the US, where they are now using jumbo jets to water bomb fires with limited success. We have chosen the complete 5Rs package, the national package, and we are very excited to have the opportunity in this fire season to use the Air Tractor 802 to see how that can work combatively with our helicopters for aerial bombardment of fires.

Bushfires NT was at pains to point out to me that none of these tools were effective without the knowledge and experience of the on-the-ground volunteers who fight the fires and provide the information to our communication teams who then are able to direct the effort of the aerial bombardments. The combination of the helicopters, the Air Tractor and the volunteers is seen as a very effective response to the bushfires this season. I thank the team of volunteers and Bushfires NT for the innovation we have seen in our bushfire fighting season.

The member for Stuart said that this statement has been very timely. We are in our bushfire season now. He acknowledged the staff of Natural Resources within the agency and spoke about some very informative sessions he has had in Alice Springs looking at the regional issues there. I thank him for his contribution in regard to the Warlpiri and their experience across the Tanami lands, how bushfires are important to them in regard to ceremonies, hunting and the important bush food regeneration. I join with him in thanking Rod Cantlay, the Senior Fire Control

Officer in Alice Springs, and the Bushfires staff in Alice Springs. There is a great deal of work being done in Central Australia by the department of Natural Resources.

The member for Stuart also spoke about the importance of equipment for our volunteers and our Bushfire Brigades. He talked about the critical aspect of our communications equipment as well as the fire fighting equipment. The fire fighting trailers that have been seen as essential equipment in Central Australia was the focus of much of his contribution. I was very interested in his discussion around the need for innovation there, particularly in the terms of the increasing weight issues that our ute trays are having to sustain. I look forward to the continued innovation out of the Desert Knowledge Research Centre for any improvements in our capacity to improve our equipment. All of the contributions focused on our volunteers in the bushfire brigades.

I note that the member for Daly indicated that the Martin Labor government had doubled the funding to the Bushfire Brigades and even with this doubling of funding there is still a very large physical and financial commitment from our volunteers, of which the government is very cognisant. We are very supportive of the work they do. We are always looking at innovative ways to ensure equipment we have, say, for example, in the Fire and Emergency Services' area, is relayed down the chain to the Bushfire Brigades. In turn, we have heard that the Bushfire Brigades relay their equipment out to the ranger group. So we really do see a chain of sharing of equipment and there is a great collegiate community amongst the bushfire fighters and the ranger groups. That is really developing in strength of the indigenous ranger groups' knowledge and Caring for Country and they are able to support each other.

It is very important that quite a few of the speakers focused on the need for preparation of the fire breaks, and picking up on the member for Daly's point of the need to reduce fuel loads on those properties and the obligations of our pastoralists in this respect.

The Leader of the Opposition talked about the obligation that rural residents have in living in those increasingly horticultural areas of the rural area. That is why this government has been very focused on the public awareness element of preparedness for our bushfire season, but also how you behave when we are in our bushfire season.

I join with members in again thanking ABC radio for their important commitment to communications about bushfires. Just last night, in terms of the Girraween fire, ABC radio was

keeping us informed as to what was happening with that fire. We did have the Stuart Highway closed at some stage.

I also join with the member for Daly congratulating the bushfire volunteers for this year and the joy they had with the opening of their new Batchelor headquarters. It was a significant moment for the volunteers at Batchelor. I note that the member for Daly talked about the increasing need to look at the rural area in relation to future fire brigades and services. I remind the Chamber it is the Martin Labor government that put in place a fire station at Humpty Doo. We are very much in tune with the increasing urbanisation of our rural areas and the need to keep a very close eye on our capacity to fight fires in those areas.

It was heartening to see support for the statement from the opposition. I look forward to meeting with the Bushfires Council at their gathering soon in Katherine. It will be an opportunity to let them know that there are very strong feelings in this Chamber about the magnificent work that they undertake on behalf of our community, to put their lives at risk through enormous challenges. Fighting a fire has to be one of the most frightening and dangerous and physically taxing work anyone can do. Anyone who has experienced a fire can understand how difficult it is with that radiated heat to get in there at close quarters and fight a fire on the ground.

Importantly, I join with members in thanking the family and friends of bushfire volunteers. They must, with a great deal of trepidation, see their loved ones off when they venture out to fight fires. I thank them for the support they give to their family and friends who are the bush fire fighters.

It was great tonight when people were thanking individually the various bushfire volunteers. We are starting to see in many of those the families, the generations, of bush fire fighting volunteers. That is one of the lovely aspects of the Territory community, to see families through the generations picking up the cudgels and taking up that important fight against bushfires.

As we have said, it is a harsh reality of the Territory. It is the nature of our tropical savannahs that we are inundated with bushfires each season. It is increasingly a critical issue because of climate change and the predictions that we see headed our way. I am pleased to have tremendous support from my government colleagues in the increasing resources we have seen the government apply to the area of bushfires and the challenges that they pose, to the innovation we have seen through the WAFMA project, and through the commitment of improving the equipment and resources available to our

volunteers and our effective brigades. Thank you to all participants in this ministerial statement.

Motion agreed to; statement noted.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms MARTIN (Chief Minister): Mr Acting Deputy Speaker, I move that the Assembly do now adjourn.

I am pleased to inform the House that Stage 1 of the new Darwin Middle School at Bullocky Point is on track to open for the start of the 2008 school year. Since the announcement was made last year to build the new school at Bullocky Point near the existing Darwin High, the project has come a long way. Local building firm, Halikos, led by Chris Giannikouris has made great progress in building the facility and their professionalism and commitment to the project should be applauded.

I also recognise representatives from the Department of Planning and Infrastructure who have been involved in the project, in particular Project Manager, Don Dowling and Senior Project Officer, Ray Carter.

The Darwin Middle School Senior Planning Team, headed by Principal, Marcus Dixon, should also take a bow. A special thank you to Marcus' planning team members, Lovell D'Souza, Loraine Caldwell, Tina Watt and, more recently, Registrar Helen MacMillan. I can report that recruitment of teaching staff to the school is well under way.

I also take this opportunity to thank the Interim Council, a group of parents and teachers from the four feeder schools, plus Darwin High, who have been meeting monthly this year. Their aim is to ensure that the facility is up and running next year, and that things such as the school's logo and uniform, its constitution, and core values are debated and settled.

The council comprises Chair, Monica Van Den Nieuwenhof, Principal Marcus Dixon, Secretary Alexandra Mullins, Erynne Fildes, Mick Purcell, Amanda Taylor, Jenny Sherrington, Lynne Wallis, Graeme Lewis, Kim Rowe, Loraine Caldwell and Kathy Hamilton. Thank you all for your hard work and, after a year of work, it is almost down to start time. Many thanks also to the departmental representatives from Education, and Planning and Infrastructure, including Leanne Taylor, Ken Hawkins, Kevin Gillan and Ian Winch.

The Darwin Middle School is part of an exciting new era in education in our Territory and my thanks to all of you for your hard work. We look forward to seeing the fruits of your labour in 2008 and beyond, not only in terms of a complete and functioning school, but also in terms of improved

educational results and the better engagement of those young Territorians aged between 11 and 14.

Tourism is central to our economic prosperity, now and into the future. We are becoming an increasingly popular destination for people in search of a truly unique venture and we boast hundreds of outstanding tourist businesses. One such business is the MacDonnell Range Holiday Park, which was named in the top 10 caravan parks in Australia by the *Herald Sun* recently. Owned and operated by Brendan Heenan and his family, the MacDonnell Range Holiday Park was selected due to the quality of its facilities, its location, the special events it stages, as well as its famous Sunday morning pancake breakfasts. The park has been one of the Territory's most successful winning 15 Brolgas, and the Best Caravan Park in Australia award in both 1989 and 2001. Congratulations to Brendan, his family and all the staff at the MacDonnell Range Holiday Park on being recognised as one of Australia's best.

The Territory boasts some wonderful cafés and restaurants. In Alice Springs, Oscar's has proved once again that it is a top class restaurant at the NT Gold Plate Awards. Following on from last year's success, this year Oscar's Restaurant has come away with two NT Gold Plate Awards for Best Restaurant/Café and for Best Stand Alone Restaurant. That is a marvelous achievement. Oscar's is owned by Edwina Davies and Anelle Bosch. It has been operating for 10 years, wowing both locals and tourists with their exceptional food and top quality service. Oscar's will now compete against the best restaurants in Australia at the National Gold Plate Awards at the end of October. Congratulations to Edwina, Anelle and the team at Oscar's on their success and achievements and best of luck for the National Gold Plate Awards.

Last month, I led a delegation to Victoria to inspect a range of aged care facilities, and I have talked a little about this in the parliament. The trip was very successful and has certainly given us a better idea of the kind of accommodation that would best suit senior Territorians. Giving senior Territorians affordable and flexible accommodation and residential care options, now and in the long term, is a major priority for government. The three members of my delegation deserve special praise. Graeme Suckling, the Executive Director of the Council on the Ageing; Brian Hilder, the President of COTA; and Senior Territorian, Annette Milikins, did a tremendous job. I take this opportunity to commend each of them on their hard work during the trip. However, their work has not yet finished. They will be holding a series of forums over the next few months to report to senior Territorians on the trip and to hear about the issues that concern them. Like us, their aim is to ensure the best

options are available for senior Territorians in the future. I thank them for their efforts.

Motion agreed to; the Assembly adjourned.