

Part 1

Speech

Delivered on

5 May 2009

by

The Hon. Delia Lawrie, MLA

Treasurer

of the

Northern Territory of Australia

Madam Speaker, I move that the Bill be now read a second time.

I table the 2008-09 additional Appropriation Bill, 2009-10 Appropriation Bill and related papers.

Madam Speaker, since I stood in this Assembly to deliver the 2008 Budget, the very basis of the world's economy has fundamentally changed.

There is no doubt this has been the toughest budget to frame in Territory history. Over the past financial year we have witnessed an exceptionally swift and severe global economic deterioration – the worst global recession for 75 years.

All developed economies, and most of Australia's major trading partners, have recorded sharply negative growth, and threaten to remain in recession for the foreseeable future.

Despite its stronger economic foundations, and substantial efforts by the Rudd government, Australia has not been able to avoid recession.

Against this setting, the Territory Labor Government has structured the 2009-10 Budget with a fundamental goal – to protect Territory jobs across all sectors of our economy.

Budget 2009 delivers this key priority by building the Territory – at its core is an unprecedented \$1.3 billion infrastructure investment in the Territory's housing, roads, schools and community, creating over 2500 construction and related jobs.

Budget 2009 delivers stronger frontline services and more frontline staff through a record \$1 billion health budget, \$808 million investment in education, and \$279 million for police and emergency services.

Budget 2009 maintains consumer and business confidence, improves economic efficiency, and invests in programs and policies that provide maximum benefit to the broader economy.

Budget 2009 demonstrates the Henderson Labor Government's absolute focus on action now to create and sustain Territory jobs, and minimise the impact of these daunting economic conditions on Territory families.

Despite severe reductions in the GST pool, the Northern Territory has increased investment spending to protect jobs and economic growth. This is a deliberate decision of Government.

The necessary result is a temporary budget deficit for the first time in six years. Importantly however, Budget 2009 demonstrates stringent fiscal and economic management through a five-year strategy to step out of deficit, while maintaining necessary levels of infrastructure spending.

This is an unprecedented budget for unprecedented times. It is a budget that concentrates on core government business – keeping people in jobs, keeping our economy strong, and keeping the Territory at the forefront of growth.

The Northern Territory Economy

Thus far the Northern Territory has stood firm in the global economic storm. The Northern Territory economy is estimated to grow by 4.1 per cent in 2008-09.

This is expected to be one of the highest growth rates in the nation.

While the global economy is not expected to recover quickly over the coming year, the Territory economy will continue to buck the trend – growing by a forecast 2 per cent in 2009-10.

This is a remarkable achievement in a period when most other jurisdictions will be struggling to record any growth at all.

Record investment expenditure, estimated to have increased by 13.1 per cent in real terms to \$5.2 billion in 2008-09, has been the primary force insulating the Territory from the slowing global economy.

Investment expenditure has been driven by major private sector projects such as the Blacktip gas project, the Bonaparte gas pipeline and the GEMCO manganese refinery expansion on Groote Eylandt.

It has also been supported by substantial Government infrastructure projects such as the Victoria Highway upgrade, the Tiger Brennan Drive extension, the Owen Springs and Weddell power stations and the ongoing redevelopment of the Darwin waterfront.

Economic growth in 2008-09 has been supported by an estimated 9.5 per cent increase in Territory exports including increased production of LNG, condensate and LPG, alumina and manganese.

Consumption expenditure, which accounts for around 70 per cent of the demand for goods and services in the Territory, is forecast to increase by 2.5 per cent in 2008-09 and 2009-10.

While record low interest rates and Commonwealth stimulus payments to households have played their part in supporting growth in private spending, it is underpinned by the ongoing confidence Territorians have in our economy.

We also continue to out-perform other jurisdictions on a wide range of key economic indicators.

In the face of sharp rises elsewhere, our trend unemployment rate has remained steady at 4 per cent over the past three months and is the second lowest nationally, behind the Australian Capital Territory.

Between the 2008 Budget and March 2009, the most recent data available shows full-time jobs have increased by more than 7000, in sharp contrast to the 0.9 per cent decrease in full-time jobs nationally.

The outlook for employment in the Territory remains positive with growth of 2.5 per cent estimated for 2008-09 and 1.5 per cent in 2009-10.

As a major employment organisation noted in a recent report – if you want a job, move to the Territory.

Greater job certainty results in greater consumer confidence, and this is reflected in our retail trade figures.

Retail spending grew by 8.7 per cent in the Northern Territory in 2008 to \$2.3 billion – well above the 1.8 per cent national growth rate. While growth is forecast to moderate in 2009-10, it is still expected to grow.

The Northern Territory's estimated population growth of 1.8 per cent in 2009 also outpaces the national average, fuelled by our young population and high birth rate – as well as positive net migration of people looking for work and attracted by our great lifestyle.

The Darwin CPI is estimated to moderate to 2.6 per cent in 2009 from 4 per cent reported for 2008.

Territory and Commonwealth government initiatives, such as Buildstart and the First Home Owner Boost, have led to large numbers of home buyers entering the Territory property market in 2008-09.

The Commonwealth's First Home Owner Boost scheme has assisted over 660 Territory first home buyers.

The Territory's Buildstart scheme provides a \$14 000 incentive to buy or build new homes. Over 183 Buildstart applications have been received and 94 grants paid so far.

These have both helped to stimulate economic activity, providing more jobs in the construction and supply industries and delivering more housing for our growing population.

However, for industries more directly exposed to global economic forces, and in particular China's retreat from its record growth, the news is more sombre.

The resources sector, so important to the Territory economy, has been undeniably affected. Nevertheless it is well placed to capitalise on the massive infrastructure spending plans announced by governments around the world.

One of the primary drivers of the Territory economy in 2009-10 will be record levels of public investment expenditure.

The \$1.3 billion infrastructure program is 47 per cent higher than is estimated for 2008-09, which is a record year itself. Spending is allocated across all parts of the Territory and in all service areas.

Budget 2009 shows that the Territory Government is acting decisively to keep our economy strong and keep Territorians in jobs.

The Territory Government had the foresight to act when global times were good to pursue major projects, and with them secure the Northern Territory's long-term future.

Mega projects such as Inpex are already having an impact, with front end engineering and design already contributing directly to the Territory economy.

The project has also had a significant indirect impact on the economy by supporting consumer and business confidence levels, which according to Sensis remain substantially higher than national levels.

This US\$12 billion project will be the largest private sector investment in the Territory's history – and the best insurance we have against the current global crisis, and potential downturns over the next generation.

Federal Stimulus Roll Out

Budget 2009 also demonstrates the Territory Labor Government's close cooperation with the Rudd Government to roll out the Nation Building and Jobs Plan stimulus package.

The Territory Government strongly supports all components of the Commonwealth's efforts to protect Australia from the worst of the downturn.

Opposition to the package would have been disastrous for the Territory economy with an immediate, negative impact on jobs.

But the massive stimulus package will only flow through to jobs numbers, if it is rapidly and efficiently delivered on the ground.

The Territory Government is already proving it is up to the challenge. Dedicated stimulus action squads have been established to deliver the package.

To make sure projects are tendered quickly and efficiently the Government has streamlined procurement arrangements, lifted thresholds, improved information flow and reduced paperwork.

Complementing this, the Government has taken quick action to increase the Development Consent Authority resources to speed up the planning approval process.

The Nation Building and Jobs Plan will provide \$350 million in infrastructure to the Northern Territory, including \$272 million to the Territory Government over four years. Tenders are already under way for:

- \$12 million in road repairs and maintenance, \$1.5 million for black spots and \$2.5 million to improve safety at railway crossings;
- \$10.5 million for the first round of National School Pride refurbishment projects in every school; and
- \$7.1 million for the first round of new and upgraded social housing in Alice Springs, Tennant Creek and Darwin.

The Commonwealth will also spend an extra \$76 million on Defence housing in the next year, a further boost for the construction industry.

Focus on Infrastructure

A fundamental component of the Henderson Labor Government's work with the Rudd Government, is a requirement to maintain Territory spending on job-creating projects, programs and policies.

The Northern Territory will go well beyond this baseline requirement – in Budget 2009 we will build the Territory through a record infrastructure spend of \$1.3 billion, an increase of \$414 million from 2008-09, to create and sustain jobs, increase economic efficiency and improve our quality of life.

In this Budget, housing infrastructure totals \$255.9 million and includes:

- \$10 million for a 44-unit seniors village in Bellamack;
- \$36.1 million for public housing;
- \$33.1 million for housing for nurses, teachers and police in the bush; and
- \$176.7 million for additional housing in remote communities.

Budget 2009 allocates \$108.6 million for land release and community infrastructure including the development of the new Palmerston suburbs of Johnston, Mitchell and Zuccoli. Land will be available in Johnston and Bellamack by the end of the year.

Budget 2009 includes a record education infrastructure budget of \$196.8 million, incorporating:

- \$101.9 million for the Nation Building and Jobs Plan package;
- \$10.7 million for secondary schools;
- \$8.7 million for remote schools; and
- continuation of the \$54.5 million Rosebery Primary and Middle schools.

Madam Speaker, community safety remains a priority for the Henderson Government, with a \$51.9 million infrastructure program also creating jobs on the ground. This funding includes:

- \$8 million for police stations;
- \$17.5 million for new and continuing works at correctional centres; and
- \$21 million for headworks for the new Doug Owston Correctional Facility.

This facility will be contemporary in design and operation, improving rehabilitation prospects and lowering re-offending rates. The current Darwin facility is clearly at the end of its useful life – only a new prison will deliver the outcomes the community requires.

Our lifestyle is a central part of what makes the Territory great. The Henderson Government will keep it that way by investing in infrastructure for families.

That means \$5 million for a water park in Palmerston, \$5 million for fishing infrastructure, including \$4 million for the Palmerston boat ramp, and \$1.75 million for further upgrades at the Hidden Valley Motor Sports complex.

Significant investment in power, water and sewerage assets continues in Budget 2009, with the five-year infrastructure program now totalling \$1.4 billion. Projects that will be undertaken as part of this program include:

- \$226 million for new power stations and distribution;
- \$49 million for improved water storage in Berrimah and at Darwin River dam; and
- \$55 million for the Larrakeyah outfall closure.

Our \$1.3 billion infrastructure investment also includes a record roads budget of \$322 million, almost four times that of 2001.

Not only do roads create jobs during construction, they open up the Territory for greater economic investment and efficiency – and that means more jobs in our pastoral, mining and tourism sectors.

In partnership with the Commonwealth, work will continue on Tiger Brennan Drive with \$89.5 million for the 7.5 kilometre extension and the Berrimah Road rail overpass. There is also \$10.3 million for additional duplication and passing lanes.

Other major roads projects include:

- \$19 million for community, beef and mining roads in our regions;
- \$5 million for improvements on the Stuart, Barkly and Victoria highways;
- \$5 million for overtaking lanes between Darwin and Katherine;
- \$4.5 million to upgrade Jenkins Road;
- \$2 million for further work on the Tanami Road upgrade; and
- \$3 million for the next stage of the upgrade and seal of the Litchfield Loop.

Budget Position and Fiscal Strategy

As responsible governments around the world recognise, maintaining a blind adherence to a surplus in this major global downturn will cost jobs and damage communities for years to come. At a time like this, when private investment slows, governments must step in.

Budget 2009 demonstrates strong economic management by maintaining spending to protect our economy, while mapping a clear, staged return to a balanced budget within five years.

After six years of surplus, a collapse in GST revenues, coupled with the Government's commitment to increase investment spending to maintain economic growth and jobs, means that a temporary budget deficit in 2008-09 and the following four years is unavoidable.

The decision to go into temporary deficit was not taken lightly – but it was made with an absolute commitment to return the budget to surplus as soon as economically responsible.

The *Fiscal Integrity and Transparency Act* requires that a fiscal strategy, reflecting current economic and financial conditions, is tabled with each budget. The fiscal strategy contained in this Budget varies from the strategy that has guided us in recent years because of the very different economic circumstances that now prevail.

The new fiscal strategy retains the previous components of sustainable service provision, infrastructure for economic and community development, competitive tax environment and prudent management of liabilities, but elements have changed to reflect the current economic and financial reality.

The sustainable service provision component provides a commitment to maintaining strong fiscal discipline by limiting expense growth over

the budget cycle to ensure there is an operating surplus in the general government sector.

During the period of economic downturn, infrastructure spending will increase to support jobs and maintain growth. The operating surplus will not be sufficient to cover this higher level of capital spending and a temporary cash deficit will result.

When revenue growth returns to its usual level, the growth in expenses will not increase at the same rate, resulting in higher operating surpluses as well as cash surpluses. The surplus funds will be used to retire debt built up during the period of economic downturn.

The infrastructure component of the strategy commits to spending at least twice the depreciation expense on new infrastructure during the period of economic downturn. When usual economic conditions return, infrastructure spending will be at least the same as depreciation.

The competitive tax component remains unchanged. The prudent management of liabilities aspect commits to return net debt to its 2007-08 level, once the economy recovers, through a 5 per cent per annum reduction in debt levels.

Turning to the estimated budget outcomes that result from this new fiscal strategy, a deficit of \$17 million is estimated for 2008-09. This is better than my February update largely due to further increases in mineral royalty payments, offset by lower GST revenue.

During 2008-09 total receipts have increased by \$275 million and payments by \$302 million. While total receipts have increased, there has been a significant reduction in GST revenue of \$162 million, or 6.7 per cent.

While tied Commonwealth revenue has increased by \$262 million, and will provide important services, it is not available for general use. Mining royalties have increased by \$137 million which is an indication of strength in our resources sector. While this growth will continue next year, it will be at a lower level.

The payment variation of \$302 million is a result of policy decisions, matching expenditure for the tied Commonwealth funding and the carry over from 2007-08.

The deficit for 2009-10 is now expected to be \$201 million, \$222 million worse than was expected this time last year. This is largely the effect of a substantial GST reduction of \$211 million, which lowers the GST proportion of our total revenue from around 67 to 55 per cent.

The reduction in GST revenue has a major effect on the Budget and all Forward Estimate years. From 2008-09 through to 2012-13, the Territory's GST revenue is \$916 million lower than estimated at the time of the 2008 Budget, due solely to the economic downturn as a result of the global financial crisis.

While the budget is expected to remain in deficit over the forward estimates years, the Government's clear path to return the budget to surplus is evident in the estimated budget outcomes through to 2012-13.

A budget deficit inevitably means that debt levels increase. The increase in general government debt since the May 2008 Budget and the end of the current forward estimate period is \$577 million – but this is \$339 million lower than the reduction in GST revenue over the same period, and demonstrates the extent of this budget's fiscal discipline.

In May 2008 the estimate for the debt to revenue ratio for the general government sector was 20 per cent at the end of the forward estimate period. The revised ratio in the 2009 Budget is 33 per cent, still approximately half the debt to revenue ratio of 61 per cent when we came to office.

Revenue Measures in the Budget

Madam Speaker, the Henderson Government is justifiably proud that the Territory is the lowest taxing jurisdiction for small business.

I am pleased to announce that Budget 2009 maintains this enviable position. I am also pleased to confirm that there are no new taxes in this budget.

Government's commitment to supporting business means we will not, for example, impose fire and emergency services levies or a land tax, which are levied in all other states.

Madam Speaker, since 2001, the Government has undertaken significant taxation reform, with cumulative tax savings totalling \$321 million.

However, the significant reduction in GST revenue has meant that the Government must extend the timelines for remaining national tax reform commitments.

The abolition of stamp duty on business transactions excluding land will now be completed on 1 July 2012. This change does not impose any new charge on Territory businesses and meets our intergovernmental commitments.

The Territory is not alone in this process. Queensland, South Australia and New South Wales have all announced that they will now abolish their remaining duties in 2012.

Madam Speaker, each year the Territory pays \$3.9 million to fund an on-road fuel subsidy of 1.1 cents per litre, mostly paid to fuel retailers, in the hope that it will be passed on to motorists.

The Parry Report indicated that Territory fuel prices were driven by the low volume of fuel sold and lack of vigorous competition.

These market conditions raise valid questions as to whether the subsidy is actually being passed on to consumers, particularly in regional areas. Tasmania and Victoria abolished similar subsidies and this resulted in no noticeable impact on prevailing fuel prices in these states.

Government has decided that Territorians are better served by redirecting these funds to the substantially increased roads and public transport budget.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2009-10 includes a range of reforms that improve taxation equity and reduce red tape.

Previously, the takeover of listed entities with valuable landholdings was not subject to stamp duty, in contrast to the stamp duty treatment of land held by Territorians when they purchase a home.

Budget 2009 will ensure that stamp duty is payable for the acquisition of valuable landholdings of large listed companies and trusts where such an entity becomes the subject of a takeover or merger.

Stamp duty rules on landholding trusts will also be aligned with the rules that apply to companies, making the stamp duty scheme simpler and fairer.

Madam Speaker, as indicated in last year's budget, from 1 July 2009, the Territory will move to more fully harmonise its payroll tax legislation with most other states.

The majority of the Territory's payroll taxpayers also pay this tax in other states. This will reduce red tape for these businesses as they will only need to deal with one set of payroll tax rules.

We will also expand payroll exemptions for charitable and benevolent institutions and wages paid to employees undertaking maternity or adoption leave or emergency volunteer work, such as fire fighting, at a cost of \$1.3 million.

Madam Speaker, many of the fees for government services have not been reviewed for years. These fee levels have been eroded by inflation and are well below the cost of providing these services.

Government will update fee and charge levels, and introduce an indexation mechanism, to apply from 1 January 2010. A similar mechanism will also be included in the penalty units legislation.

Although unrelated to the budget and not a revenue source for government, the Motor Accident Compensation Contributions Commissioner has determined a 5 per cent increase in motor accident compensation premiums, in line with increases in benefits. Government has therefore decided not to increase motor vehicle registration fees.

I am advised that this MACA increase will add approximately \$20 to MACA premiums, or an overall registration increase of 3.7 per cent.

Madam Speaker, I now turn to specific initiatives in Budget 2009.

Business, Jobs and Training

Budget 2009's core focus is on protecting and creating jobs for Territorians.

In addition to our unprecedented \$1.3 billion infrastructure investment, the Henderson Labor Government will create new and boost continuing programs to help Territorians into jobs.

Budget 2009 provides an additional \$1 million per annum to support an extra 10 000 apprentice and trainee commencements between 2009 and 2012.

In cooperation with the Commonwealth, \$1.3 million is being provided for a Trade Training Centre in Tennant Creek.

\$500 000 is provided to establish two regional jobs hubs, one in Nhulunbuy and one in Tennant Creek, to support local employment.

During 2009-10, in response to the global economic outlook, Tourism NT will focus on stimulating demand for Territory tourism experiences and supporting local tourism businesses. A Tourism Stimulus Response of \$9.3 million over two years will target campaigns in selected markets and assist operators to improve their business operations.

Tourism NT will also spend \$1.57 million to increase the Territory's competitive aviation access position in key source markets.

Community Safety

Madam Speaker, keeping Territorians safe is a key Government priority.

A centrepiece of the Henderson Labor Government's Budget 2009 community safety program is a three-year program to deliver a new Berrimah fire station, at a cost of \$12.3 million, combined with a substantial increase over four years in fire and emergency services resources.

In 2009-10, Government will provide \$1.65 million to commence the first phase of this initiative, with 11 new fire fighter positions for Darwin and nine new fire fighters for Alice Springs.

Budget 2009 continues the important Safer Streets initiative, with additional funding in 2009-10 of \$5.1 million, taking the total funding for this program to \$9.3 million. This initiative tackles crime and disorder in urban centres head on by boosting uniform police numbers by a further 25 and providing an additional 10 police auxiliaries.

The Government is also directing \$2.5 million to establish police beats in shopping precincts – we've already seen how successful this visible police presence has been in Casuarina.

We will also provide \$6 million to upgrade the Alice Springs police station and \$2 million to convert the Numbulwar police post to a fully operational police station.

Budget 2009 delivers \$3.4 million to establish and maintain closed circuit television systems in the greater Darwin area, and \$7.2 million to continue the upgrade of the Police, Fire and Emergency Services digital radio network.

This expanded and more effective police presence will lead to more successful investigations and prosecutions, which is why Government will also allocate \$3.8 million to improve court capacity, boost prosecution resources, and strengthen the forensic science branch.

The Territory Labor Government is keen to embrace and fund new ideas to drive our criminal re-offending rates down. Budget 2009 therefore provides \$2 million to establish a regional prisoner work camp in the Barkly region.

It is unacceptable that most violent crime in the Northern Territory occurs within a domestic relationship. Government will provide an additional \$15 million over three years to enhance domestic violence prevention services and support our world-first mandatory reporting laws.

Closing the Gap continues to achieve results in the justice sector through \$2.9 million for remote area community corrections officers, and rehabilitation programs for family violence and sex offenders.

Funding of almost \$1 million is also allocated in Budget 2009 to address antisocial behaviour through Darwin area night patrol services, and a Palmerston office to coordinate accommodation and return to country programs.

There is additional funding of \$544 000 in 2008-09 and \$1.1 million ongoing to expand emergency accommodation for young people at risk in Alice Springs.

Affordable Housing for Territorians

The Henderson Labor Government's focus on housing will create jobs and help more people to buy their own home.

Homestart NT will provide low to middle income earners with assistance to purchase their own homes. Targeted at the affordable housing market, Homestart NT will provide access to 40 per cent of properties in the Territory's main centres while requiring no more than 30 per cent of household income in repayments.

Income levels are linked to household size, with access to the scheme geared towards families. Homestart NT will provide low and middle income earners with the most substantial package of assistance ever to help them achieve home ownership.

Madam Speaker, the Rudd and Henderson Labor governments are also working together to realise the fundamental right all people have to appropriate accommodation.

The Nation Building and Jobs Plan package will provide \$64 million over four years to expand social housing throughout the Territory. The Remote Indigenous Housing National Partnership Agreement will provide \$1.7 billion over 10 years for new and upgraded housing in remote areas.

This massive building effort will be complemented by \$21.4 million in Commonwealth funding to support tenancy and maintenance services for remote housing.

Health and Families

For the first time ever, a Territory Government will deliver a \$1 billion health and families budget.

This 117 per cent increase in health funding since 2001 demonstrates the Henderson Labor Government's focus on improving health outcomes of all Territorians, no matter where they live.

Highlights in Budget 2009 include an additional \$2 million to continue the after hours urgent care service at the Palmerston super clinic hub. Since it opened, over 3700 Palmerston residents have used this important service.

Construction to expand the Palmerston super clinic will commence in 2009-10, and an additional \$960 000 is also included to expand Palmerston ambulance services.

The cancer centre will be completed by the end of this calendar year, and take in patients from early 2010. Government will provide \$2 million to support this important step forward by providing modern, supportive accommodation for patients and their families from outside Darwin while they undertake treatment.

Government also recognises that there has been historic neglect of young people and adults with complex care needs. Over many years this has adversely affected individuals and the wider community.

In Budget 2009 this will dramatically change – Government is directing \$13.9 million in 2009-10 and 2010-11 to construct secure care facilities and additional secure beds in Alice Springs and Darwin hospitals.

Another strong community concern is access to public dental services. Government is therefore allocating additional funding of \$1.5 million for general dental services to cut our waiting lists by providing 4000 extra appointments in the first year.

We are commencing a ten-year heart health plan in 2009-10 by allocating an additional \$630 000 to improve cardiac services.

Closing the Gap initiatives are continuing through \$5.5 million for expanded services for children in care, child protection services and chronic disease programs.

Education

The \$808 million Education and Training budget will improve educational outcomes for all Territory students.

Budget 2009 provides \$11.2 million over two years to establish the Alice Springs dual campus middle school and youth hub, with \$4.76 million in 2009-10 and \$2.6 million in 2010-11 for upgrades at the Gillen campus and Anzac Hill campus. In 2010-11 a \$3.85 million 30-bed boarding facility will also be constructed.

To help close the educational outcome gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, funding of \$5.1 million will deliver six additional school counsellors, five mobile pre-schools and 16 additional remote area teachers to support increased enrolments.

Budget 2009 also commences a \$2.6 million, five-year commitment for the Families as First Teacher program, to support Indigenous families in remote locations.

Lifestyle, Environment, Community Services

Madam Speaker, the Territory offers the best lifestyle in Australia, and the Henderson Labor Government is making sure it stays that way.

In Budget 2009 funding of \$9.7 million is provided to support sport and recreation initiatives and facilities across the Territory, including:

- \$1 million for remote community sport and recreation programs; and
- \$1 million extra to build and upgrade sporting infrastructure.

New funding of \$2 million each year will also be provided for the next four years for parks infrastructure to support the Territory's Tourism Stimulus Response package and improve access to our beautiful environment.

Madam Speaker, Budget 2009 also improves our public transport system by providing \$1 million for park and ride facilities in the greater Darwin area; \$600 000 for new bus services in Darwin; and \$1.8 million for expanded free bus travel for students and seniors.

The Government is also providing an extra \$3.3 million to increase pensioner and carers concessions for motor vehicle registration, drivers licences and power and water subsidies.

Budget 2009 includes a further \$1.1 million to support arts and festival initiatives. There is also a three-year, \$2.1 million commitment for ecoBiz NT, a new program to improve business energy efficiency.

Government is also providing \$10.5 million to our great thoroughbred and greyhound racing industries as part of industry funding agreements.

Vision for the Territory's Future

Last week the Chief Minister released the draft Territory 2030 strategic plan, to encourage new ideas and help the Territory grow. In Budget 2009 funding of \$1.5 million has been allocated to implement the plan, along with \$1.1 million to continue our path towards statehood.

Conclusion

Madam Speaker, the Northern Territory faces incredible challenges over the coming financial year, as we travel through this turbulent global economic period.

These unprecedented times require complete focus on what matters most – protecting the jobs that support our hardworking Territory families.

An unprecedented infrastructure spend demonstrates the Henderson Labor Government's absolute commitment to doing everything it can to protect jobs.

Record-breaking health, justice and education budgets will provide the frontline services every Territorian deserves, no matter where they live, and give our kids the best possible future.

In the most challenging global economic conditions we have faced since Self-Government, this is the Budget to carry the Territory safely through the storm.

I commend the Bill to the House.