

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G**

Mr G. S. Musgrove (Chair) Mr B. W. Davidson  
 Mr D. E. Beanland Mr G. B. Fenlon  
 Hon. T. R. Cooper Ms L. H. Nelson-Carr

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. H. Palaszczuk, Minister for Primary Industries  
 Dr W. Hoey, Director-General  
 Mr K. Dunn, Acting Deputy Director-General  
 Dr R. Clarkson, Executive Director, Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences  
 Mr J. Skinner, Executive Director, Corporate Performance  
 Ms D. Anderson, General Manager, Finance and Business Development  
 Mr G. Dawson, General Manager, Client Information Services  
 Mr G. Robbins, Institute Director, Queensland Beef Industry Institute  
 Mrs R. Lea, General Manager, Resource Management, Queensland Fisheries Management Authority  
 Mr J. Pollock, Executive Director, Fisheries  
 Mrs M. Hardy, Principal Policy Officer, Policy and Legal Services  
 Mr P. Neville, Executive Director, Policy and Legal Services  
 Mr K. Jackson, Acting Institute Director, Queensland Horticulture Institute  
 Ms D. Wanigesekera, Acting Executive Director, Regional Industry Business Services  
 Mr R. Beck, Executive Director, Forestry

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 The Committee commenced at 8.30 a.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee G now open. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 1999 for the areas set out in the Sessional Orders of 27 August 1999. The Committee will examine the proposed expenditure for the organisational units in the following order: Minister for Primary Industries; Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading; Minister for Families, Youth and

Community Care and Minister for Disability Services.

The Committee has also agreed that it will suspend today's hearings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10 a.m. to 10.15 a.m.; a break from 11.45 a.m. to 12 noon; lunch, 1 p.m. until 2 p.m. and two 15-minute breaks at 4 p.m. and 5.45 p.m. I remind members of the Committee and Ministers that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after the extension of time has been given. The Sessional Orders require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers in respect to each organisational unit is to be allotted to non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between Government and non-Government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that Hansard can record that information. I also ask that mobile phones be switched off.

In accordance with the Sessional Orders, a member who is not a Committee member may, with the Committee's leave, ask a Minister a question. In this regard, the Committee has agreed that it will automatically grant leave to any non-Committee member who wishes to question a Minister, unless an objection is raised at the time by a member of the Committee. Also in accordance with the Sessional Orders, each Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Again, a single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of that time limit.

In relation to media coverage of this hearing, the Committee has agreed that silent television film coverage be allowed for the Chairman's opening statement and for each Minister's opening statement. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Primary Industries to be open for examination. The time allotted for this is three hours. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to proceed direct to questioning?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Mr Chairman, I will take the opportunity to make a statement.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much. The time limit is five minutes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Thank you. The 1999-2000 State Budget will position the Department of Primary Industries to advance Queensland's food and fibre to the world. Through an enhanced research development and extension effort to be driven by new science, technology and innovation agencies, Queensland will strengthen its reputation as a world leading innovative food and fibre producer. Based in the Department of Primary Industries, the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences will bring together research, development and extension resources from across the department to deliver better outcomes for Queensland. The move will make our department one of Australia's—indeed, one of the world's—leading food and fibre science technology and innovation agencies. The department's RD and E program, which involves more than 1,400 staff in 148 centres, attracts \$100m in funding. The formation of AFFS—which, of course, is the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences—honours the Government's election commitment to establish a world-class science organisation to promote scientific excellence in research, development and extension services for food and fibre production. Through AFFS, DPI will deliver improved services to meet the needs and aspirations of existing and new clients from every stage of food and fibre production, manufacture, export and consumption.

The department will assist industry to focus on environmentally sustainable, safe and quality food and fibre production and ensure that it is responsive to global consumer expectations and market demands. The department will deliver on this commitment through innovative science and technology, the development of high-value products and services, trade and market development, sustainable development and rural community development.

The 1999-2000 budget for DPI is a cash appropriation of \$376m from all sources compared with a \$381m budget for 1998-99. This means that the Budget allocation will enable the department to maintain current service delivery standards and staffing levels. 1999-2000 is a transitional year in moving from cash budgeting to an accrual accounting basis. All financial statements in the 1999-2000 State Budget papers have been presented as far as possible on a comparable

basis. However, some transitional issues between the cash and accrual accounting treatments should be noted.

It is not possible to draw a valid comparison between the cash program statements contained within the 1998-99 State Budget papers published in September 1998 and the output accrual operating statements presented within the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Therefore, reference to a decrease of \$26.6m on the 1998-99 total unaudited actual in Budget Paper No. 4 refers to the following: reduced receipts from the Department of Natural Resources under service level agreements with the corporate services agency for the implementation of SAP; reduced receipts from the Commonwealth and other States for the papaya fruit fly program; notional revenue from goods received below fair value from other Government departments under AAS29 reporting, which are not included in the 1999-2000 estimate; the purchase of SAP software in 1998-99; and, of course, the completion of several capital works projects, including the upgrade of the Tick Fever Research Centre at Wacol and the completion of the Centre for Climate Applications in Toowoomba. Finally, let me reassure the Committee that there will be no staff reductions and no action has been taken to curtail or delay service delivery resulting from the 1999-2000 Budget.

I welcome, as do the officers of the Department of Primary Industries who have joined me, the opportunity to discuss the Budget Estimates with members of the Estimates Committee. The 1999-2000 Budget represents a solid foundation for future directions. If I may, for the benefit of the Committee I would like to introduce the senior officers of my department who are with me today: Dr Warren Hoey, the Director-General; Mr Kevin Dunn, the acting Deputy Director-General; Dr Rosemary Clarkson, Executive Director, Agriculture Industry Development; Mr John Skinner, Executive Director, Corporate Performance; Mr Peter Neville, Executive Director, Policy and Legal Services; Mr John Pollock, Executive Director, Fisheries; Mr Ron Beck, Executive Director, Forestry. Other officers will be available if required to be called. Mr Chairman, I commend the Budget Estimates to you and welcome questions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first period of questions will commence with non-Government members.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, I acknowledge your remarks and I also acknowledge the departmental officers present today—every

one of them. I acknowledge the enormous amount of work that they do in compiling responses and so on for the Estimates proceedings.

I will jump a few questions based on the remarks that you made about there being no staffing cuts. Can you explain why, on page 4 of the MPS, staffing levels in the beef industry services are projected to drop from 216 to 205? The Bowen branch of Agforce has alerted me to the fact that two of its beef extension officers are being offered transfers, leaving the Ayr-based officer responsible for five shires, 850 properties and some 510,000 head of cattle. That involves two officers. There is a total of 11 staff to be cut, as indicated in the figures for the beef industry services. Those staff cuts are obviously staff cuts. They appear in your own budget documents. Where are they being picked up, if, as you said, there are to be no staff cuts at all?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Firstly, you are right. The Queensland Beef Industry Institute does have two extension officers at Bowen at present. The department intends to reduce that number by one by Christmas. QBII management has prioritised staffing to better utilise its resources to meet the demands of the beef industry. The extent of the beef industry in central Queensland and in the south west, which includes the Channel Country, means that both positions have a higher priority than a second position at Bowen.

QBII's activities in the Bowen, Burdekin and Dalrymple Shires are changing from scattered pockets of staff and resources in all centres to a concentration of research and extension staff in Charters Towers who are better able to service the changing needs of the beef industry. Bigger groups of RD & E staff are better able to develop innovative and targeted projects that are more able to meet the needs of industry and consumers than scattered staff who then lack the personal contact to stimulate the creativity needed to plan those required projects. I think you would understand that. QBII has beef extension officers located in Ayr, Mackay and Charters Towers who are all able to service the Bowen Shire as required. QBII also maintains a research station, Swans Lagoon, at Millaroo near Ayr, with a full complement of beef cattle researchers and technicians.

In relation to your question on staff cuts, relating to page 4, quite obviously the department is reprioritising, but we are still

maintaining a very healthy complement of staff within the beef industry.

**Mr COOPER:** I guess that is your view, Minister, because a staff cut of 11 is a staff cut of 11. I am worried still about the Bowen branch because, as I have said, you are going to have one officer responsible for five shires, 850 properties and some 510,000 head of cattle. Agforce has brought that to my attention. It is concerned and its concerns are my concerns. I reiterate that they are staff cuts and nothing can change that. Budget Paper No. 4 states, "After adjusting for the equity return in 1999-2000, there is a decrease of \$26.6m on the 1998-99 total actual."

What programs have those Budget cuts been drawn from?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You have asked a rather technical question, so I might pass it across to Mr John Skinner. I will come back to you in relation to the assertion that there are staff cuts within the beef industry.

**Mr COOPER:** It is not an assertion. It is in the Budget papers that there will be a reduction from 216 to 205.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will come back to you.

**Mr COOPER:** Could you also tell me how you will address the problem in Bowen, because obviously they have concerns and those concerns should be yours.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will address that.

**Mr SKINNER:** As outlined by the Minister in his introduction, the \$26.6m is made up of a reduction of \$13.7m in operating funding and \$12.9m in capital funding sources. The reduction in the operating funding sources available to the department primarily relates to lower estimates of own-sourced revenues, largely due to reduced receipts from the Department of Natural Resources under the Corporate Services agency implementation of SAP, reduced receipts from the Commonwealth and other States for the papaya fruit fly program and notional revenue for goods received below fair value from other departments under AAS29 reporting, which is not included in the 1999-2000 estimate. The reduction in the capital funding resources relates to the purchase of SAP software in 1998-99 and the completion of several capital works projects, including the upgrading of the Tick Fever Research Centre at Wacol and the completion of the Centre for Climate Applications in Toowoomba.

In terms of attempting to make comparisons on a like with like basis, as outlined by the Minister in his introduction, the

comparison is in the order of \$5m in terms of Budget adjustment. On a cash basis, the Beef Institute is largely unchanged in terms of Budget. In terms of the cash basis, a number of projects have been completed, including Kingaroy office accommodation and the beef industry recovery strategy that was a one-off, one year funding. The West Indian drywood termite pest incursions and the Northern Territory exotic fruit fly projects, for example, have been completed. That shows the difference between comparing budgets with budgets.

**Mr COOPER:** Thank you. Obviously the figure of \$26.6m is still there. I realise that this involves the equity return, but a cut is a cut is a cut, similarly with staff numbers. While I respect your answers, I do not accept them because there are still cuts. If the overall Budget of any department is cut, of course you will have difficulties through the year. Obviously, that will unfold. Minister, last week, your colleague the Treasurer said that if a department's liability dropped, in other words, it disposed of assets during the financial year, it will get to keep the 6% equity return. Can you guarantee that DPI will not divest itself of assets for a one-off money grab of that equity return, remembering that the equity return was, I think, \$11.3m?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will pass that question to Mr John Skinner.

**Mr SKINNER:** The target that we have been given by Treasury in terms of our capital assets, particularly land, is \$1.7m for this year. At the moment, the department has a review of all its assets and properties under way, which is being undertaken by the Department of Natural Resources. That review will attempt to identify any properties that may be surplus to requirements. We have been advised that we will be able to go back to the mid-year Budget review process with Treasury if we believe that we have been unable to identify suitable surplus assets for disposal. That is the situation until we complete that review and then we approach the Treasury as part of the mid-year Budget review process.

**Mr COOPER:** I understand how it works. The main thing is, as you have answered, you are looking for properties to dispose of?

**Mr SKINNER:** That is correct.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Could I add that what we are really doing is maintaining our performing assets. We are looking at working with the Department of Natural Resources to try to minimise the impositions that are put upon us by Treasury. Where we have performing assets, they will stay within the

department. I can assure you that the majority of our assets are performing.

**Mr COOPER:** You are trying to identify assets for sale or disposal. We will see what those are. We will follow it throughout the year. I know Treasury has made it hard for you. There is no question about that. It is a huge amount of money. You have to make sure that you do not just succumb to Treasury and its demands to the detriment of DPI. I refer you to page 57 of the MPS and to the tabled headed Opening Statement. In particular, I refer you to the 1999-2000 financial year totals for user charges, employee expenses and supplies and services. When you add the corresponding figures for each of DPI's Output Operating Statements—that is, on pages 10, 15, 20, 24, 29, 34, 39, 44, 49 and 53—the total comes to \$258.421m. The Operating Statement on page 57 lists a total of \$269.951m. That is a discrepancy of about \$11.53m. I seek an explanation for that. Is it a simple miscalculation or has a slush fund been put aside? What is the reason for that?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I wish it was.

**Mr COOPER:** Obviously, the idea of accrual accounting is to prevent slush funds. If that figure, as I have said, comes to \$258.421m and a total of \$269.951m is listed, there is a discrepancy. I need an explanation for that.

**Mr SKINNER:** I believe the explanation for that is that we would be comparing accrual with cash figures. This being a transition year, as outlined previously, it is not possible to make comparisons between the two, based on one figure being an accrual figure and one being a cash figure.

**Mr COOPER:** I need to know which figure is correct.

**Mr SKINNER:** Perhaps Danielle Anderson could discuss that a little further. I think you will find that they are both correct.

**Ms ANDERSON:** The 1999-2000 year is a transitional year and we are moving from a cash budgeting to an accrual accounting basis. All financial statements in the 1999-2000 State Budget papers have been presented as far as possible on a comparable basis. However, there are some transitional issues between the cash and accrual accounting treatments that should be noted. It is not possible to draw a valid comparison between the cash program statements contained within the 1998-99 State Budget papers published in September 1998 and the output accrual operating statements presented within the 1999-2000 MPS. In relation to the

recast of the 1998-99 Budget figures presented in the output accrual operating statement shown within 1999-2000 MPS, those have been converted to reflect the significant accounting policy changes and the introduction of accrual accounting and management for an outcomes framework. Departmental transactions and activities under accrual accounting have been separated into those which are controlled by DPI and those which the department administers on behalf of the State Government and according to accrual accounting standards.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You have given us about a dozen pages.

**Mr COOPER:** I know. But we went to the trouble of adding up those pages. If you want to take it on notice, I will place it on notice.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** No, we are pretty well right.

**Ms ANDERSON:** If you turn to page 5 of the MPS, you will see that note No. 3 indicates that the output summary excludes revenue and expenses relating to the provision of services by the corporate services agency to the Department of Natural Resources and DPI Forestry. Corporate services provided to DPI Forestry under the service level agreements with DPI have also been excluded. The output summary on page 5 excludes those items as noted in note 3, and the statement on page 57 includes them.

**Mr COOPER:** Returning to the difference of \$11.53m, we will not call it a slush fund. You can call it what you like. What are you going to do with those funds? Will they be taken out? Will you use those?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Could I just put it this way: both figures are correct. Comparing accrual accounting methods with cash accounting methods is like comparing apples with pears. You cannot compare them that way. You have to compare apples with apples and pears with pears. This is a transitional period and I think you will find in the next Budget that things will be a lot different. The figures will be much easier to interpret.

**Mr COOPER:** Not less rubbery.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is not true.

**Mr COOPER:** I turn to page 55 and the vessels replacement line item contained in the table headed Capital Acquisition Statement. The capital funding allocation from last year was underspent by \$3.134m. In your reply to my question on notice you stated that three vessels were not replaced during the year as anticipated. Can you tell me why they were not replaced?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me reassure the Committee that there is going to be no reduction in Boating and Fisheries staff. The staffing levels will remain as they are. This year we launched the K. I. Ross at Gladstone. It is probably one of the most modern vessels in boating and fisheries patrols anywhere in Australia. You mentioned the non-replacement of three vessels. Actually, it is two vessels and an outfit of a third one. I will go through that for you now.

Our vessel replacement program predominantly relates to the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol, which currently operates approximately 95 vessels throughout the State. Expenditure under the program can be quite cyclical as a result of changes in operational requirements from year to year and the length of time required to construct major vessels. Let us have a look at the Murchison. The budgeted cost was \$1.1m. It was not replaced pending the outcome and implications of the Warrego internal review, which was budgeted to cost \$0.75m. There was another vessel. The new Investigator was budgeted to have a refit at about \$0.5m. Basically, what we are saying is this: these are major vessel replacements. The vessels are still in very good condition. They are performing extremely well. But at the end of the day when Governments make a decision it is basically the same as a family making a decision on the replacement of, say, a car. You do not do it each year. You wait until you are ready to do it. In this case, this year we have postponed the purchase of these two new vessels and the refit of the new Investigator.

**Mr COOPER:** For how long have they been put off?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Mr John Pollock is the Executive Director, Fisheries. He might tell you where we are now with those three vessels.

**Mr COOPER:** The question was: why have they not been replaced as anticipated?

**Mr POLLOCK:** The Minister has identified the three vessels. The Warrego is a research vessel and the Murchison is a vessel belonging to the Boating and Fisheries Patrol. At my instigation, we have been reviewing the feasibility of having a vessel that can service both elements of my business group. My reason for doing that is that they are big vessels. They cost in the order of \$1m to \$1.5m each. We were talking earlier about asset management. Also, the boating patrol has increased since the long-term Treasury funding for this was put in place about seven or eight years ago. Since then we have

opened three new patrol bases. I have to look at different strategies for managing those assets. I am withholding the purchase of those until that review is completed to see whether we can feasibly manage with one boat between the two groups.

**Mr COOPER:** Obviously, there is a lot of pressure on the patrols, because complaints are coming in all the time. There is an allocation of only \$1.679m. In the Cairns Post I noticed that someone—I am not saying you—who was arithmetically challenged claimed that there had been no cut in the patrols budget, and yet we have seen quite a substantial cut. Can you confirm that the Noosa and Maroochydore Boating and Fisheries Patrols do not have a vessel capable of offshore patrol work and that they are required to use a vessel from Brisbane? Those areas are obviously important. They do not have an ocean-going vessel. They have to get one from Brisbane. In the time that that takes, any need for it has obviously dissipated. Could you explain to me why they have to continually use a boat from Brisbane, especially given the continual budget cuts in that area?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will pass that on to Mr John Pollock.

**Mr POLLOCK:** There is no budget cut that I am aware of to the Noosa area. I suppose if we asked each patrol base whether they wanted an ocean-going vessel, they would all put their hands up. The point is that we are servicing with greater than 10-metre vessels from Hervey Bay, from Pinkenba and from the Gold Coast. It is my judgment that I do not need another ocean-going vessel to be based at Noosa. We program these vessels on a rolling three-month work program. They can also have ad hoc or emergent responses, but it is my view that we are adequately serviced with ocean-going vessels in south-east Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, would you—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The time for non-Government questions has expired.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me just reassure the Committee that there has not been any funding cuts within the Department of Fisheries. If I can go back to 1994-95, the allocation was \$7.588m; in 1995-96, \$7.796m; 1996-97, \$9.290m; 1997-98, \$10.436m; 1998-99, \$10.685m; 1999-2000, \$10.759m. In actual fact, there has been a very, very slight increase in the budget allocation for Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol operating allocation and costs. So I do not know where you got those figures.

**Mr COOPER:** Out of the budget books.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I have just given you the details of the allocations from 1994-95 to 1999-2000. I cannot see any budget cut there.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We will go now to a Government member.

**Mr FENLON:** On page 30, dot point nine of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements states that an emerging issue for developing high quality plant and animal based products is the domestic and global expectation for increasing varieties of convenient, safe food. What is the DPI doing to assist the food industry in meeting its food safety obligations?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The tone of the question that the honourable member has asked is becoming far more relevant in today's world not only here in Australia but worldwide. Let me just say this: in Queensland, since most of our food products originate in primary industries, the department is conscious that food safety is critical to retaining consumer confidence in the industry within Australia and overseas and the maintenance of Queensland's export markets for raw and processed food products. The primary industry sector is increasingly implementing food safety systems to improve its capacity to meet customer and market needs. The department is working in partnership with industry to develop technologies and systems to underpin these systems and through the Centre for Food Technology and other units in the department to provide food safety awareness, training, technical advice and verification services.

Many primary industries food businesses incorporate hazard analysis and critical control point base systems into systems as they jointly address food safety and quality issues. Measures to assure food safety in primary industries are being enhanced. The soon to be established Queensland agrifood authority will ensure preventive food safety for meat, dairy and seafood products up to the point of transformation or entering into retail. This authority will contribute to a food safety system for assurance of food safety from source to customer.

**Mr FENLON:** On page 32, paragraph 5 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements, you refer to ongoing reprioritisation as a critical strategy in ensuring industry and Government responsiveness to emerging trends and opportunities. In responding to emerging trends and opportunities, what has the department done

to implement Labor's election commitment for a world class Rural Science Organisation?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In response to the honourable member, let me just say that the announcement from the State Budget in relation to the Agency for Food and Fibre Science was a major initiative of this Government. I referred to it in my opening address and I believe it does create a great deal of importance to not only our industries but also our consumers.

The Rural Science Organisation and its peak science industry council were announced by me, as I mentioned previously, in the recent budget. The aim of the Rural Science Organisation is to promote leading edge technical innovation through world class research development and extension for Queensland's primary industries. The implementation of this election commitment is aligned with the Government's priority for an internationally competitive economy that contributes to growth and the creation of sustainable employment. The establishment of the Rural Science Organisation will integrate and stimulate innovation across commodities in the longer food chain.

Direction and priorities will flow from the peak council and individual industry development councils. Statewide research development and extension coordination, innovation and productivity in primary industries will be improved in the context of ecologically sustainable development. Staff will have skills they can market to other institutions and the private sector for the overall benefit of Queensland. I think I might ask Dr Rosemary Clarkson, who is in charge of putting the Agency for Food and Fibre Science together, to further comment.

**Dr CLARKSON:** The agency will be made up of 10 units in the department and the RD and E effort will range from the climate work through biotechnology to the work of the individual institutes—the five industry based institutes—and into the post harvest area of the Centre for Food Technology. So we do believe that we are now able to address the emerging needs of the food and fibre industries right along the chain from the working genetics and production right through to the retail sector. We believe that, by bringing all those groups together in that way, we can stimulate a lot more creativity and innovation in that we can have all the groups working in biotechnology across all those 10 units working together. Those that are working on GPS and GIS systems and those sorts of things can work together and stimulate each

other and, we think, develop far more innovative projects for the benefit of the food and fibre industries.

**Mr FENLON:** On page 30, dot point 8 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements, there is an emerging issue in relation to delivering high quality plant and animal based products, in particular, to biotechnology developments. In what major areas is DPI's biotechnology operating?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me first inform the Committee in response to your question that the department is one of the few organisations in Queensland undertaking biotechnology research and development in the agribusiness sector. Biotechnology has been increasingly used in the department's research programs over the past decade to improve the production systems and the end product for consumers. A steady build-up in the knowledge and expertise has resulted with around 85 staff now being employed in biotechnology research. The department is currently using this technology for research in the grains, horticulture, beef, poultry, pig, aquaculture, sheep, forestry and sugar industries. Some specific areas undergoing research include that molecular markers have been identified in cattle for growth rate, meat yield, fat cover, marbling, tenderness and eating quality. This information is now being used in breeding programs and to place Australia at the top of the world meat grading systems.

Tick fever disease in cattle costs Australia around \$28m per year. The department is involved in international research to apply biotechnology to the development of tick fever vaccines and diagnostic tests for cattle in both Australia and Zimbabwe. In a revolutionary approach to management of feral animals, the department is working with Cornell University to induce sterility by feeding contraceptive antigens in genetically modified plants. Molecular markers are being used to develop vegetables resistant to diseases, leading to a reduction in chemical use. \$9m is currently being expended by the department on biotechnology research projects, with about half of them coming from external sources. To sum up, I can tell the Committee that the department has been working on biotechnology for the past 10 years. The department has certainly progressed the biotechnology research to a point now where some of the results of our research are at the cutting edge of world research. I think the people of Queensland owe a great deal of gratitude to our scientists who are involved in this research.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I call the member for Mundingburra, Ms Lindy Nelson-Carr.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** The second last dot point on page 17 of the MPS mentions your highly successful trade mission to the Middle East. What export outcomes and opportunities were found for Queensland rural products in the Middle East following the trade mission to the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I presume that the honourable member has heard me in the House refer to the trade delegation I had led to both the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia last April. I have referred to that trade delegation on a number of occasions in the House, because I believe it was a very successful delegation.

To give the Committee an idea of the outcomes of that delegation, I would just like to say that this trade mission and the department's New Markets Middle East project identified and generated significant opportunities for our DPI's rural clients. Queensland companies negotiated trade contacts to supply seafood, horticultural products and processed food. This trade mission generated immediate trade outcomes of \$100,000. Over the next six months we anticipate commercial contracts to reach \$800,000. Over the next three to five years the companies—and these are just the eight companies involved—anticipate trade outcomes to reach approximately \$10m.

Companies have established relationships with key contacts and buyers in these markets. Contracts under negotiation include distribution agreements, direct export sales, licensing agreements and various tenders. Diplomatic relations between Queensland and the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have also been strengthened by opening the door to high-level talks and the development of key contacts.

A delegation of major retail buyers visited Queensland in June as a direct result of the trade mission's visit to Saudi Arabia. One of the companies offered our Queensland exporters the complimentary opportunity to develop a Queensland-theme food promotion in their Jeddah and Riyadh stores. At this very moment, those companies are in Saudi Arabia. I understand there are well over 20 companies using that complimentary service provided by the largest supermarket chain in Saudi Arabia. By promoting Queensland's image as an efficient and reliable source of food and fibre products, this trade mission has resulted in future trade opportunities. This includes incoming trade delegations and the

Tamimi Safeways supermarket promotion, which I mentioned to you just previously.

We have also participated in the Saudi agriculture trade show and a Government-led technical mission to the United Arab Emirates. In conjunction with the Department of State Development, the DPI is also developing a three-year strategy. This strategy aims to consolidate the initial success outcomes achieved by the New Market's project. In a nutshell, it was a very successful trade delegation. We are receiving some very positive results.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 31, dot point 13 of the MPS you make some reference to the appointment of a chief scientist. What has the DPI done to implement Labor policy in relation to a chief scientist?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In accordance with the policy Let's Get Queensland Moving Again, Labor's commitment to primary industry, the department created a position of Chief Scientist. Dr Joe Baker, a very well respected scientist worldwide, was appointed to that position. He has a very distinguished career as a research leader in academia, industry and Government. The position of Chief Scientist is a part-time position. This allows Dr Baker to hold prestigious positions with related scientific organisations, helping the Queensland Government to develop strong and formal links with the national and international scientific community. Dr Baker also holds a part-time position as Commissioner for the Environment with the Australian Capital Territory as well as appointments with international scientific committees. In his role as Chief Scientist, Dr Baker will advise the Queensland Government through me as the Minister for Primary Industries in relation to issues relevant to food and fibre-based science and technology. I can also add that the position of Chief Scientist was created in January 1999. It is a part-time position with a three-year contract. I think Dr Hoey would like to add a few words.

**Dr HOEY:** The role of the Chief Scientist is a very critical one. An agency such as ours has an enormous research, development and extension resource spread right across the State. We value its development and growth and its ability to keep at a leading edge very highly. The chief scientist will help to increase the profile of our agency. It will help in forming alliances with other R & D providers, which we increasingly have to do: universities, the CSIRO and other Government agencies. It will make sure that we are developing our scientific resources not only for today but also tomorrow and the emerging needs that sometimes

surprise us, so that we can make sure that this agency has the right capacity to deal with the issues facing the primary industries of Queensland.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to page 25, dot point 1, of the MPS and the comment regarding election commitments. In the lead-up to the last State election in Queensland, a number of commitments were made by Queensland Labor to improve the management of fisheries in this State. What are the main achievements to date?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the lead-up to the last State election, Queensland Labor published a policy statement specifically relating to the fisheries of Queensland. This publication is titled *Let's Get Queensland Moving Again—Towards a Fishing Future for Queensland*. The publication outlines the approach that the Labor Government agreed to take in supporting fisheries. It also gives details of specific initiatives. The policy recognises that a successful fishing industry will promote employment and economic growth in the State. Our fisheries policy statement has been supported strongly by all sections of the fishing and aquaculture industries. The elements of our fisheries policy are now being implemented, which include: a review of the roles of the Government fisheries agencies in Queensland, changes to improve fisheries management and support of the fishing industry—that review has now been completed by Mr Peter Neville and I am assessing his review—an expansion of fish stocking, particularly in rural and remote areas; the establishment of a fisheries monitoring team to improve the level of management information available on the status of our major fish stocks; continuous improvement of the planning and approval process for agriculture; and increased emphasis on the management of wetland habitats that support our fish stocks.

**The CHAIRMAN:** At dot point 1 on page 18 of the 1999-2000 MPS you refer to promoting the economic importance of primary industries to all Queenslanders via public relations events and initiatives. What is DPI contributing to the Year of the Outback 2002 promotion to provide support for this team based project?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Firstly, I inform the Committee that Year of the Outback 2002 has my total support and the support of the Queensland Government. The Premier announced Cabinet support for the declaration of the concept in Rockhampton on 31 May 1999. This exciting initiative will further bridge

the gap between city and country Australia. The potential for the Year of the Outback is only limited by our imaginations.

The Premier has noted that Outback 2002 offers an excellent opportunity to showcase the distinctive social, cultural and economic characteristics of outback life, including primary production, education, trade, tourism, arts, communication, and Aboriginal and ethnic interests. This promotion, I am pleased to say, has also won the support of the Prime Minister.

The idea was first promoted by a leading Queensland businessman who is pretty well known to most people in political circles, Mr Bruce Campbell, MBE. Our bush icon RM Williams, whom I visited about three months ago to ask whether he would like to serve as the patron of the celebration, has agreed to serve as the patron, which is good news for the promotion of the Year of the Outback 2002.

The department has already supported the promotion by providing public affairs and publication services, including the time and effort of a graphic artist, who prepared the first round of promotional material for the project. The department's rural information specialists will be utilised to disseminate information about Outback 2002. The department's web site will carry details of Outback 2002 and the DPI call centre will be used to compile a database of individuals or groups who express an interest in participating in Outback 2002.

The new DPI information centre, Farm Link, will also be used to disseminate information to its users. The department will also provide a workstation within the Rural Industry Business Services group for a member of the project team. The workstation will include the use of a computer and access to a telephone, a fax machine and photocopying service. In addition, on a needs basis the department will continue to provide graphic artist and desktop services. This is on top of the assistance given by the department to a number of ongoing community based projects such as the outback revival in Longreach to help Queensland communities get back on their feet and is in line with the Government's priority of building Queensland's regions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I call the member for Crows Nest.

**Mr COOPER:** Just a few moments ago, Mr Pollock, a public servant for whom I have a great deal of regard said that there was no need for any more ocean-going patrol vessels, that we could make do with what we have got.

Do you concur with that, Minister? Do you agree that Noosa, Maroochydore and all of those areas can be properly patrolled from Brisbane and elsewhere?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I believe that the service has adequately patrolled our eastern seaboard and I can see no changes to that at all.

**Mr COOPER:** I inform you that the good people of Noosa and Maroochydore do not agree and that the QCFO and Sunfish do not believe that is possible. Page 26 of the MPS states that compliance with fisheries laws in 1998-99 was maintained above 90%. How can that statement be regarded as credible given the massive prawn poaching conducted under your nose in Moreton Bay earlier this year, ongoing complaints about reef fish poaching in the north, the absence of the vessel monitoring system in Moreton Bay, cutbacks to your colleague Mr Welford's marine parks budget and the lack of suitable ocean-going patrol boats on the Sunshine Coast? How can you say that compliance rates of over 90% can be upheld?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will start with the Moreton Bay area. The issue of illegal prawn poaching has certainly been highlighted this year. I became aware of the need to do something about the prawn poaching in Moreton Bay and I am pleased to announce that I am ready to take to Cabinet a limit of one bucket of prawns per person. This equates to approximately six kilograms of prawns. I believe that is an adequate amount for our recreational fishers to take. Of course, this will give our Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers the opportunity to police the illegal poaching that has occurred over the years under previous Governments. Unfortunately, it has been there. Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers have not been able to patrol that, simply because there has been no regulation in place to enforce a one bucket limit. We are going to introduce that. I will ask Mr John Pollock to address the other issues you have raised.

**Mr POLLOCK:** I agree with the Minister's statement that there was no law to enforce when it came to recreational limits for prawns. The decision by the Government to introduce that is just to address that notion of unfair access, if you like, and maybe even commercial trade. That is in hand.

The statement about non-introduction of VMS into the Moreton Bay trawl fleet is a valid one. It was a decision that the VMS committee looked at seriously. I guess there are a couple of reasons for not doing that. One is the size

of the boats involved in Moreton Bay. They are generally very small trawlers. We have found in the past that enforcement of any closed waters fishing works very well on the grapevine. We do not need VMS because people ring you up and tell you if they are going to go anywhere near it. But the cost imposition on the Moreton Bay trawl fisherman was the one issue that led to our decision to not impose VMS on those boats. We have, as you know, installed it on some 660-odd east coast trawler fishermen where remote distances are more of an issue for us than is enforcing closed waters.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, you are aware that there is illegal fishing and illegal sale of seafood arising from lack of patrols and lack of inspection. I drew attention to illegal fishing on 2 October. Your comments to me on that day were that you were not aware, that there was no evidence of a black market in fishing operating in Queensland waters, that we have a fine patrol and so on. How can you reconcile that with a statement from Mr Rob Whiddon, the chief of staff of the Premier's office, who said when replying to a fishing organisation—

"Your comments regarding illegal sale of seafood have been specifically noted. Mr Palaszczuk advises the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers are aware of black marketing problems and have undertaken a number of prosecutions in relation to illegal fish sales. It is understood, however, that QBFP believe that a major impediment to addressing the issue lies with current legislation, which greatly curtails powers of entry of fisheries inspectors to premises which routinely trade in seafood."

How can you reconcile those two statements?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will ask John Pollock to respond.

**Mr POLLOCK:** There are two issues with respect to black marketing. One is the local or domestic black market of seafood from the recreational catch sector. You are quite right in identifying an element in that letter that says that powers of entry are one issue—I repeat: one issue—that somewhat restrict the boating patrol. That is being looked at now as part of the review of the Fisheries Act. We intend to take our own counsel on the policy initiatives behind that and the legislative principles we have to comply with to try to address that. We will be bringing that up to Government when the review is completed.

The second element of it is black market of interstate fish. We have acknowledged that there is a problem with things such as abalone

trade through Queensland. The one mechanism we can put in place to address that is a national docketing system. We are also progressing that to be included in the same legislative review. That initiative has very fulsome support, I might say, from the southern States, because they are very concerned about the black market of abalone, particularly in south-east Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, I point out what I think must be typographical errors on page 28 in the number of fisheries management plans completed. That is in the line item on page 28. The 1998-99 Actual shows that only one plan was completed, but my records show that the spanner crab, gulf fisheries and freshwater management plans were all completed. Similarly, the line shows that four plans are to be completed this year, but I am only aware of the trawl and the coral reef and subtropical finfish management plans. Which is the one that I have missed?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me start by giving the response this way. The QFMA has committed some \$800,000 in annual operational funding to the fisheries management planning program over the past four years. A similar amount has been committed for the 1999-2000 year. The program provides for an extensive community and stakeholder consultation process, which includes 10 zonal advisory committees and seven management advisory committees. These committees provide fisheries management related advice to the Queensland fisheries management board. Over the past four years, the program has published and released for public comment 10 fishery discussion papers and six draft management plans option papers.

**Mr COOPER:** Which is the one that says four are completed? I only have three.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will pass it on to John Pollock.

**Mr POLLOCK:** I understand from the QFMA that the other plan that was intended for completion this year when that was written was the blue swimmer plan.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, can you indicate a more definite date for completion of those management plans? Specifically, though, will you proceed with the trawl management plan in the form originally proposed, or will you adopt the concerns of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You have certainly raised an issue that is creating quite a deal of concern out there in the community. On the

one hand, we have the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, together with Senator Robert Hill, who are trying to impose the recommendations of the Hussey review on the Queensland Government. The Queensland Government has its own east coast trawl management draft plan.

**Mr COOPER:** You can implement that if you wish, can you not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes. However, I do not believe that we, as a Government, can really get ourselves involved in a fight with the Federal Government because, at the end of the day, Federal laws override Queensland laws. That is not to say that the QFMA is not working together with the GBRMPA authority to try to arrive at a solution to the number of sticking points in the draft management plan that will be satisfactory to all parties concerned. What I am trying to do, Mr Cooper, is to bring about an outcome with a consensus from all sides similar to the outcome that we had in the RFA process.

**Mr COOPER:** Not as bad as that, I hope!

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is not to say that, at the end of the day, the Queensland Government will not introduce its own east coast trawl management plan.

**Mr COOPER:** Please don't let it be like the RFA.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is a big win, the RFA.

**Mr COOPER:** What projections has your department done on the economic and employment impact of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority's trawl plan? You must have done some impact assessment of the economic and employment effects, so you can counter their argument.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will pass that on to John Pollock.

**Mr POLLOCK:** We actually initiated, about 18 months ago, a broad economic analysis of the total of the Queensland commercial fishing industry. That project is about two-thirds completed now. We also have done a little bit of work on the question you are asking—the very specific impact of any wind-back of effort on the trawl fishery. This is being fed into negotiations, as the Minister said, on the trawl industry. But I cannot give you any specifics.

**Mr COOPER:** That is okay. But it has been 18 months, and you are two-thirds of the way through.

**Mr POLLOCK:** That is enabling us to understand how the fisheries operate—multiple use of endorsements, big

boats, little boats, and so on. That will help us in any future effort to adjust or have buybacks in the industry.

**Mr COOPER:** Similarly, Minister, what are the projections that the department has done on the economic and employment impact that the QFMA-developed trawl management plan will have? Have you done the figures and the homework on that?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority—to correct a statement you made earlier—do not have a plan. The Queensland Government, through the QFMA, have a plan. I make that point. In relation to the other issue—John?

**Mr POLLOCK:** Minister, I cannot add anything further to that.

**Mr COOPER:** That is on the QFMA. You have the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority. Whether or not they have a plan, they have an impact. So I want to know what the impact is going to be on our fishing industry, and a lot of other people would, too. Similarly, with the QFMA-proposed plan, has there been an impact assessment of economic and employment factors on that plan?

**Mr POLLOCK:** I do not think I can answer that with facts and figures at this stage, Mr Cooper, except to say that part of the broad-based economic study will indicate to us whether we are likely to lose big boats, small boats, boats that are using multiple endorsements. But I cannot target that at, say, Bowen or Yeppoon or Brisbane to say where the boats are going to come from.

**Mr COOPER:** But on the industry as a whole?

**Mr POLLOCK:** There will be a reduction in effort. The industry itself has accepted that.

**Mr COOPER:** The economic impact, though, on employment and so on?

**Mr POLLOCK:** There will be an impact. We could probably put the number of units that are actually going to come out of the fishery, because the industry itself, in working through TrawlMAC to develop what you call the early version of the QFMA plan, acknowledged that a certain level of fishing effort in the trawl fishery was a good thing to target at. And that acknowledged that there would be some boats coming out of the water. So there will be an impact, but I cannot quantify it.

**Mr COOPER:** I know there will be an impact. What we need is an impact

assessment on what the effect is going to be on the industry.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I would like to suggest to the Committee that we have Mrs Rosemary Lea from the QFMA. If I could call on her, I am quite sure that she will be able to satisfy the question that you have just asked.

**Mr COOPER:** Yes.

**Mrs LEA:** There has not been a detailed economic assessment done yet on the proposals in the trawl plan because they still are proposals. There is, in principle, a position being taken that we will use an independent assessment allocation committee to determine what levels of effort units are allocated to individual fishermen. And until such time as that committee does the allocation, we cannot determine what impact it will have on individuals, because it will be depending on the units that they are given. The units they receive will be based on the historical fishing patterns, and we will be monitoring, as the QFMA, all of that work as we go through the process.

Up front, the allocation or the capping of effort in the fishery will have some minor impact—and again, that is an assessment rather than a calculated figure—a minor impact on individuals, but the detailed impact will occur only when they choose to do an upgrade or a change of vessel. But as I said, we will be monitoring that situation. We will have people involved from DPI and QFMA, perhaps from the Australian Bureau of Resource Economics, and other experts working with us in the next 12 months before the allocations are made.

**Mr COOPER:** I think you have my point, on both the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park cause and effect and so on and so forth. It is the industry we are thinking of and the effects on them.

With regard to fisheries output, page 28 of the MPS makes reference to the fisheries management plans completed last year, one of which was the freshwater fisheries management plan gazetted in April. That plan provided for the introduction on 17 October of the permit system for fishing in stocked impoundments, with the option of the collection of a fee to fund fish stocking programs. I think I saw in a press statement yesterday that that was being put back to July 2000, but you might correct me on that. I ask this question on behalf of the Freshwater Fish Stocking Association, which is supportive of the fee. If the fee has been put back, could you explain the delay?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** With regard to stock impoundment permits, my understanding is that the matter is currently with the Parliamentary Counsel in order to change the effective date. We are going to issue permits through Australia Post because this is the most cost-effective way to administer this program, simply because we have over 600 post offices scattered throughout Queensland. The post offices need to be geared up to get themselves ready for the issuing of these permits. The time frame we are implementing now is that the permits will be in operation from 1 July 2000.

**Mr COOPER:** With regard to the meat industry, pages 7 and 8 of the MPS refer to your department's work to date and also refer to future involvement in the reform of the meat processing sector, as well as the implementation of the meat processing development initiative. What is the membership of the meat processing task force?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is an interdepartmental committee—

**Mr COOPER:** You are the stakeholding Minister, are you not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The task force consists of members of the Department of State Development, the Department of Primary Industries and the EPA.

**Mr COOPER:** What measures have been established to ensure the integrity of the process under which the business arrangements of individual abattoirs are assessed when applications for Government assistance are considered?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let us go through the process again. In October 1998, the Government established the Queensland Meat Processing Development Initiative which, of course, is the task force you are referring to. It administers a program which has \$20m of funding over three years. The scheme is aimed at providing financial assistance for those industry components who wish to establish sustainable export oriented or import replacement value adding activities in Queensland.

The task force has invited expressions of interest, with QMPDI assistance, from over 60 meat industry organisations and 29 expressions of interest have been received from proponents ranging from small rural businesses to significant regional and urban meat processors. The task force members have worked closely with these firms in order to finalise formal QMPDI applications, or to

identify opportunities for other Government assistance through schemes such as the Queensland Investment Development Scheme and the Queensland Trade Assistance Scheme and through the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. I am just going through what you know already, Russell.

**Mr COOPER:** Yes, I know. What measures have been established—

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will get Miriam Hardy from the department, who is on the task force, to give you a response.

**Mrs HARDY:** As the Minister has said, the task force comprises members from the DSD, the DPI and the Environmental Protection Agency. The task force has worked closely with the industry to identify opportunities for sustainable development of the industry into the next century. We are looking to improve value adding rather than concentrating on the commodity product. In addition to the grants programs to which the Minister has referred, the task force also administers the Queensland Meat Processing Development Initiative—QMPDI—and \$20m has been set aside for that over the next three years.

As the Minister indicated, the task force has approached 60 meat processing operators and has received expressions of interest from 29 of those. At the moment, the task force has approved funding for three final developed cases—one being Darling Downs Bacon for its redevelopment and additional value adding. Support has recently been announced for Southern Queensland Exporters Pty Ltd for the establishment of a sheep fellmongering plant at Wallangarra, which will involve 20 jobs, and Western Exporters at Charleville to support a rendering plant for a sheep and goat abattoir.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 18-10 of the MPS mention is made of the Queensland National Action Plan for Rural Women. How does DPI's involvement with rural women, and in particular women producers, complement the work of the Office of Women's Policy?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Office of Women's Policy is responsible for implementing policies and programs which reflect the needs of the broader community and which address the ongoing issues of gender inequality. The Office of Women's Policy examines the situations of women across such areas as health, education and training, employment, housing and child care. Specifically, the department has set as one of its priorities the increased participation of

women in decision making in agriculture. The department comes from the position where previously only 50% of the people in rural industries were involved in decision making. We would like to see that figure go up to 100% of the people within our rural communities.

Following a national consultation process, the National Plan for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management was developed. The Queensland plan—a Vision for Change; Women Working for the Future of Rural Queensland—mirrors the key areas of the national plan. The Queensland plan is a guide for rural women, community organisations, industries and Government on how to better support women in agriculture and resource management. It provides best practice strategies on how to increase rural women's involvement in leadership and thus reduce the barriers which prevent their participation.

The department works collaboratively with the Office of Women's Policy in delivering strategies to recognise the contributions of women and increase their participation in decision-making roles. The Queensland plan has received support from individual women, from industry groups, from key stakeholders such as the Queensland Rural Women's Network and the Queensland Country Women's Association, from the Agricultural Industry Association and other Government departments for whom it is relevant.

Looking at the experience of the Queensland Rural Women's Network and considering the great work that that organisation is doing and the networks it is creating throughout Queensland, I have great faith in the strength of the women in our rural communities. I believe that, over time, the role of women will be strengthened in agriculture in Queensland.

**Mr MUSGROVE:** I refer to page 18-12 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements where mention is made of the Positive Rural Futures Conference at Goondiwindi. Minister, why is DPI involved in Positive Rural Futures Conferences, and what outcomes are being achieved?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The department works in partnership with the Office of Rural Communities and the Priority Country Area Program to sponsor and deliver the Positive Rural Futures Conference each year. These conferences have been held in the past three years in such regional centres as Charters Towers and Biloela, and most recently at Goondiwindi. I would like to inform the Committee that I was fortunate enough to be invited to open the conference at Goondiwindi.

The conferences provide an opportunity for rural communities across the State to gather information, seek expert advice, plan future strategies and projects and network with other communities to learn from their experiences in relation to a self-help approach. At the Goondiwindi conference this year, well over 300 representatives from some 65 rural communities researched and developed their action plans for community and economic development, greater involvement in education and strategies for involving youth—which, of course, is very important in our rural regions. By engaging local government and community groups in economic development through the conferences, the department is expanding its network and partnerships beyond traditional industry organisations and involving a wider range of stakeholders in the future development of Queensland's primary industries.

The department's rural partnership continues to work with many of these groups throughout the year helping them to implement relevant actions and strategies. Outcomes being achieved by rural communities as a result of the conference include diversification of local economies, greater focus on new market opportunities, increased use of information technology, better use of community infrastructure, assets, skills, and, of course, improved community capacity to manage change.

If I could just add for the benefit of the Committee, Mr Chairman, that the energy that I noticed at the conference in Goondiwindi was such that I believe the future for primary industries in Queensland is very bright. It was very pleasing to see the number of younger people who attended the conference but, more importantly, the number of women who were there. Certainly, there is a changing face of primary industries in Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much for that answer. That is certainly encouraging news. At page 26 dot point 4 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements mention is made of net fishing in Trinity Inlet. During the Mulgrave by-election the Government announced a reduction in net fishing in Trinity Inlet. What progress has the Government made on this commitment?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes, that was an election commitment during the Mulgrave by-election. Of course, the election commitment was the closure of Trinity Inlet to commercial net fishing. I can inform the Committee that negotiations for the closure are now nearing completion. Letters were sent to all net fishing

licence holders providing details of the closure and inviting fishers to participate in an adjustment assistance scheme.

A regulatory impact statement was released for public comment to ensure full consultation on this initiative. The Government has considered responses to the regulatory impact statement. The fisheries affected are: N1, N2, N6 and N7 licences. The department is currently considering applications from fishers to participate in the adjustment scheme. The department is considering the removal of bait nets N6 (bait licence) from Trinity Inlet and considering ex gratia payments to be provided to fishers for loss of these nets in Trinity Inlet. No final allocation of ex gratia payments has been made. In closing, I would like to say that it would be inappropriate of me to comment further until the application assessment process is completed.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. I appreciate that. I call the member for Greenslopes.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, at the last paragraph of page 22 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements mention is made of the department's involvement in innovation and value adding to primary products. What is your department's actual capability in encouraging value adding to primary products?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the outset, let me say that I do not know whether value adding is a term that we should be using; perhaps we should be using the term "adding value" to our primary industries, which would be far more reflective of what is being done with our primary industries in Queensland at present. Basically, the department has a dedicated unit that provides research and technical services to enterprises and individuals who wish to become involved in adding value. The Centre for Food Technology provides these support services through the food technology services output in my portfolio. The services available include new product development, processing, technology improvement, interpretation of food regulatory requirements, the development of food safety plans, food analysis for export certification and research into new food ingredients. The services of the centre are well known and well used by current and potential value-adding enterprises, with over 1,000 clients having used this service, of which over 500 are doing so regularly, which means at least once a year.

Peter Skarszewski, who is the director of the unit, is not here. Perhaps Dr Rosemary

Clarkson might be able to detail some of the more exciting developments that have occurred at the centre over the past few years.

**Dr CLARKSON:** I think one of the real features of this service is that any person with a good idea for a new product, particularly a post-harvest product, can give the centre a ring and get advice on where to go next. That advice is really complete advice. It may be on special ways to design the product to meet the consumers' needs, it may be whether there is a market for that sort of product, it may be that they are working on a product and that they have excess waste and they are wanting to know what to do with the waste. So the service is really a complete service. When the product has been designed, the centre makes sure that the product fits into the quality assurance system of the company.

I think it is also important to think about fresh products and fresh chilled products. There is huge consumer demand for that. So increasing the shelf life of those products and making sure that they have packaging that is environmentally friendly, attractive and adds to the product's convenience is also another feature of the work of the centre.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, according to page 17 dot point 10 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements, over the past nine months there has been a huge client demand for Futureprofit. Please explain why DPI is involved in this type of training and what have been the training outcomes?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Futureprofit program is really successfully developing the capacity of Queensland farm families to achieve increased profitability and sustainability. The program does this by involving family members in flexible learning opportunities that assist family members to develop and implement strategic planning processes in managing their farms and natural, human, financial and production system resources.

The Queensland program delivers on the Department of Primary Industries' key outcomes by assisting Queensland farm families to develop more competitive and viable businesses and more sustainable production systems. The Department of Primary Industries and I as Minister are committed to Futureprofit as part of its role in delivering the Government's priorities of skilling Queensland, providing better quality of life and valuing the environment.

At the individual property level, Futureprofit has achieved considerable success. This is evidenced by the 727

workshops held in 1998-99. Three workshops in north Queensland with the three river groups resulted in the group obtaining Natural Heritage Trust project funding for fencing off and reparation of riparian areas. A combined Futureprofit beef plan group in central-west Queensland is now self-directed and has identified future training to build on their previous learnings and skills.

Futureprofit projects in west and south-west Queensland have been combining computer training with resource management, which involves mapping and planning. Farm families have moved from using computers for cash record keeping to using them for making better management practice decisions based on natural resource capabilities. A survey of past Futureprofit participants in south Queensland revealed that 32 properties had implemented natural resource management changes to the value of over \$1.2m. The works included weed, pest and native vegetation management, river/stream improvements, revegetation, gully stabilisation, earthworks, dam construction, contour banks, waterways, cropping technologies and rotations, and control of grazing pressures.

Evaluations indicate that there is more farm management planning by land-holders after attending Futureprofit workshops. Management changes include using climatic data before planting and cutting hay, diversifying into enterprises such as farm forestry that have less impact on natural resources and greater financial potential, and choosing to leave agriculture altogether. A specific application that is on at present is Dairy 2000, which ensures that every dairy farmer will have a plan supporting decisions if and when—or if—deregulation does occur in Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much for that, Minister. At this point, I think it might be appropriate to adjourn for a period of 15 minutes for morning tea.

Sitting suspended from 10 a.m. to 10.17 a.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearings of Estimates Committee G are now resumed.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, I refer to page 12 dot point 2 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements where interstate certification assurance is mentioned. The department has been responsible for the development of the interstate certification assurance scheme. What have been the benefits of this scheme?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The interstate certification assurance or ICA scheme has been developed by the department to provide Queensland producers with an efficient and cost-effective method of certifying that their produce meets interstate quarantine requirements. Queensland businesses can now be accredited to issue assurance certificates for the produce they treat. Previously, they had to pay for an inspector to supervise and issue certificates.

Importing States are prepared to accept these assurance certificates because the businesses accredited under ICA are regularly audited to ensure that they are following the procedures provided by the ICA scheme. These procedures use quality assurance principles and are based on current best practice. They are subject to continuous review to include improvements based on research, practical experience and technical developments.

The ICA scheme has allowed several new quarantine treatments to be introduced that were not available under traditional Government certification. These include field treatments and complex treatment systems that cannot be supervised by an inspector. An example is the bait spraying and inspection treatment approved by Victoria this year for fruit flies in citrus.

More than 900 Queensland businesses are currently accredited for one or more of the 21 different ICA treatment procedures available. These cover most of the major interstate quarantine requirements applying to Queensland produce. Certificates issued under the ICA scheme are accepted by all Australian States. These States have also adopted ICA for certifying their own produce. This means that the same standards for certifying produce will apply to all growers in Australia.

**Mr COOPER:** Before the break I was asking about the meat industry task force and its make-up, and I have received that information. I was also asking about the integrity of that task force and the process under which the business arrangements of individual abattoirs are assessed when applications for Government assistance are considered. My next question refers to the South Burnett cooperative meatworks at Murgon.

Further to the issue of integrity in the meat processing task force, I refer to a member of that task force, Mr Ray Riding, who is said to have a very close association with a competitor of that plant, Australian Meat Holdings. On Thursday, 30 September, Mr

Riding was accompanied by the joint CEO of AMH, Mr Don Ferguson, and an accountant from that company. It strikes me as passing strange that these people are taking a very close interest in Murgon when we are trying to keep competition in the industry. Minister, as I have said, you are the stakeholding Minister and you have an interest in the meat industry. You also have an understanding of the intricacies of the meat industry, including the intense competition in the industry. Do you consider that that incident has very substantially compromised the integrity of the task force?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the outset, you are right that the Department of Primary Industries is the lead agency. We have control of the Act. However, we are working in partnership with the Department of State Development in relation to the operations of the task force. I will now ask Mrs Miriam Hardy to respond to you in greater detail.

**Mrs HARDY:** I will take the first point of your question first, about the process within the task force for identifying the viability of businesses. On processors indicating to the task force that they have an interest to explore their future business development, task force officers work closely with the organisation to identify and develop a business plan and look at the future changes that could be put in place in their business operations. It should be noted that South Burnett did not approach the task force for such assistance, even though it had been approached, in writing and verbally, to do so.

In relation to the specific instance that you refer to, Mr Ray Riding is a member of the task force and an officer of the Department of State Development. I am not aware of the detail of that visit. I think we should take that matter on notice and get back to you at a later time.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Could I also suggest that if you have any evidence of impropriety, please let us know about it. Personally I do not believe that Mr Ray Riding being on the task force in any way compromises the workings of the task force. However, if you have any evidence, please pass it on.

**Mr COOPER:** That is not the point. The point is that he visited the plant with the CEO of AMH and an accountant of that company, and AMH is a direct competitor. You know that we are trying to keep competition in the industry. I am saying that that is a funny way of doing it. I think you will find that that has compromised the integrity of the task force.

The Government consistently has refused to release the details of all the assistance

provided under the meat processing development initiative. Only selective announcements have been released, and we have talked about KR Darling Downs. However, nothing has been said about the beef abattoirs. It seems that some arrangements are conveniently regarded as commercial in confidence and others are not. As I say, we know about KR Darling Downs and others. It has also been revealed by the Transport Minister that AMH has been provided with at least some assistance from the Queensland Government in the form of Queensland Rail's construction of a \$5.585m rail siding at Dinmore, and good luck to AMH for getting it. I have no problem as far as AMH is concerned. However, as this is all taxpayers' money, the people have a right to know how all of that \$20m has been spent. As you are a stakeholding Minister, in the interests of public knowledge I would like to have a full account from you of all of the spending of that \$20m. Would you be in favour of releasing that information?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will allow Miriam Hardy to respond and then I will get back to you.

**Mrs HARDY:** The QMPDI is a three-year program. It has obviously taken some time for the task force to work up proposals with members of the industry. The companies that I mentioned earlier are the companies that have endorsed and approved projects at this stage. Many more have a number in development but which have not been considered by the QMPDI assessment committee. In terms of DDB, there was a public announcement of \$1.8m in support for its extension of value adding at Toowoomba. In relation to the other two companies that are referred to, the levels of support were commercial in confidence. Those are the three companies that have approved support under QMPDI.

**Mr COOPER:** I understand the need for commercial in confidence. However, it is strange that some are released and some are not. We are all nonplussed by that. You said previously that you were taking one of those questions on notice?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes.

**Mr COOPER:** I will return to questions on the fishing industry. I turn to page 28 of the MPS and to the table headed "Output Statement" for DPI Fisheries. I refer specifically to the number of units inspected by the Queensland Boating and Fisheries Patrol. The actual result fell short of the targeted 29,400 units by 240 units. This year's target for inspections represents an increase of 600

units, or 2%. On 22 September in the Courier-Mail you announced that on-the-spot fines would be introduced in March. You claimed that they would free up Boating and Fisheries Patrol officers to spend more time policing recreational and commercial fishermen. Why is it that the QBFP did not achieve last year's targeted number of inspections and why is there only a paltry 2% increase in the targeted number of inspections for this year?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The on-the-spot fines came into effect from 1 July this year. I do not think we have had enough time to assess how well this scheme is going, but I understand it is going pretty well. I will ask Mr John Pollock to give you a more detailed response.

**Mr POLLOCK:** If I recollect the figures, it was some 220 out of 29,000.

**Mr COOPER:** It was 240.

**Mr POLLOCK:** There was a shortfall of 240 out of 29,000. The target is just that—a target. I would like to see us exceed the target each time. I cannot give you an answer as to why we had a shortfall of 240 boat contacts out of 29,000, except to say that it is a pretty small proportion. The budget has been maintained pretty well at status quo. As you pointed out, there has been a small increase of 2%. To my knowledge, there has been no significant shortfall in any area of boating patrol activities. We are still bedding down VMS. It is a little early yet for us to fully realise the potential that we foreshadowed for VMS. We are still having trouble making sure that the reporting systems work. We have had intermittent reports of battery failure. We had a GEIS positioning problem in August this year that was worldwide. It is too early for me to give any report on the savings or reallocations that we are going to make as a result of VMS.

**Mr COOPER:** The QCFO and Sunfish are concerned. They do not agree that sufficient emphasis is being placed on patrols and targets. The estimated increase of 2% is regarded as being far too low. I pass that on for your interest. Minister, page 8 refers to your department's policy input into reforms to industry organisational arrangements for the dairy, fisheries, horticulture, sugar and pork industries. Since the release of the Budget, it has subsequently been disclosed that the Government is to introduce new legislation to remove the statutory levy collecting powers of those five organisations. I understand that this decision has been based on Crown Law advice that the collection of excise is an exclusive responsibility of the Federal Government.

On that basis, the collection of a portion of those levies for functions such as crop insurance, the Banana Industry Protection Fund, the Bureau of Sugar Experiment Stations and other research is matched dollar for dollar by the Federal Government. This could also be questionable. Can you assure the Committee that you will introduce alternative funding mechanisms to ensure that those extremely important industry services are maintained and that not one dollar in revenue is lost? Can you give us an idea of what form that mechanism will take?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This has certainly been the subject of quite a deal of media speculation. I am currently consulting with industry on the proposals for reform of the five statutory producer representative bodies. A confidential discussion paper has been distributed to industry for comment and I have received considerable feedback from those bodies and also from their constituent units. I do not think I can discuss this any further until the legislation has been approved by Cabinet. You understand the process.

**Mr COOPER:** You are aiming to bring it into the Parliament soon?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I am aiming to introduce the legislation into the Parliament sooner rather than later to give those five peak industry bodies some certainty. Hopefully, that will start from early next year.

**Mr COOPER:** In the Departmental Overview on page 1 reference is made to the establishment of the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences. Page 32 also refers to the establishment of the Queensland Food and Fibre Science Council, which will be chaired by you. We have spoken about the institutes before. Will each of the institute boards that currently set strategic direction for commodity research and development be formally represented on that science council?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The answer to that is: no. But in accordance with the policy Let's Get Queensland Moving Again, we are putting together the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences. As I mentioned earlier, the person in charge of progressing the agency is Dr Rosemary Clarkson. We have not reached a decision as to the final make-up of the agency. We will not do that until we have had extensive discussions with industry groups, the institutes and all other relevant bodies that would be involved in this new agency.

**Mr COOPER:** I suggest you keep the door open for those institutes. Would you confirm to the Committee that under your restructure the institute boards will not just

continue to exist but will maintain their current strategic roles and responsibilities for resource allocation and project implementation?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The whole issue of the role of the institute boards is open to discussion now between Dr Rosemary Clarkson, the boards and Dr Joe Baker.

**Mr COOPER:** I have a sneaking suspicion that the institutes might be heading for the chop; am I right?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think you are no further from the truth—

**Mr COOPER:** I am what?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You are a long way away from the truth. That is a very false statement.

**Mr COOPER:** That is the impression I am getting.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The institutes and their boards have served industry well.

**Mr COOPER:** I know that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Under the new Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, we aim to enhance the roles of the institutes.

**Mr COOPER:** We will see.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will ask Dr Warren Hoey to add to that.

**Dr HOEY:** My rule of thumb in helping to set this up is to keep the best of what we have and improve on areas that we need to improve. I have been in personal contact with the institute board chairs and many people throughout industry to ensure that, in making any changes, we build on that which has been good and on the significant gains that have been made. The institutes have made many gains in recent years, given their young age.

Nevertheless, coming into an agency in one big business group headed by an executive director means that their roles will change slightly. The benefit, as I see, in putting a lot of our R and D resources—and we have an enormous capacity in that area—into a large business group is to be able to raise our profile, to be able to coordinate our resources, our application of technology and our delivery of services a lot better than we have in the past. We all know that we can do better, and our clients and our masters demand that we do better. We believe that there are a lot of positives. We are very mindful of the importance of the partnerships that those institute boards have offered and the benefits they have delivered and will be seeking as much as possible to maintain that.

**Mr COOPER:** In relation to the budget, I mentioned a question on notice. Minister, you disclosed that the AFFS would have a budget of \$100m sourced from existing departmental functions. Funding for your department has been reduced by \$26.6m according to Budget Paper No. 4, so what will be the impact of this reallocation of funding and the reduced budget on each of the institute's budgets and allocations? In other words, are you going to cut the institutes' budgets?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will let Dr Warren Hoey start off the answer.

**Dr HOEY:** We will manage all of those changes within existing budget allocations.

**Mr COOPER:** The budget will be cut or not?

**Dr HOEY:** Not the \$26.6m.

**Mr COOPER:** The institutes, though.

**Dr HOEY:** We have levied right across the agency an internal productivity dividend, a small dividend which we used to reallocate to high priority activities. So we have levied a small dividend and we have reallocated that back to high priority R and D areas.

**Mr COOPER:** So the budgets will be cut?

**Dr HOEY:** Only a very small amount and it will not impact on service delivery or staff numbers. The formation of the agency and the formation of the council will be done within current allocations. We have planned this very, very carefully. We are not expanding staff numbers. If anything, we will seek to gain some efficiencies in our management area in order that our service delivery is not impacted upon.

**Mr COOPER:** You have said that there will not be any reduction in the level of services offered, but can you assure the Committee that the addition of another two layers of bureaucracy, that is through the form of the AFFS and the Food and Fibre Sciences Council, will not lead to an even greater push towards full cost recovery for services to producers?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance we are not increasing the level of bureaucracy.

**Mr COOPER:** That is a matter of opinion.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is a statement of fact.

**Mr COOPER:** Okay, you have given your answer. I have asked the question. We will see. As far as the full cost recovery is concerned, are you considering levying producers to get full cost recovery for provision of services?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Dr Hoey will respond to you.

**Dr HOEY:** This Government is very, very sensitive to the fee for service issue. Any intentions to raise fees for services needs to go before Cabinet. As part of our plans in establishing the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences and the council, there are no plans as a result of that to increase our fees for any services we currently charge for.

**Mr COOPER:** I refer to the department's efforts to reposition hoop pine as a premium product—that is page 66 of the MPS—which relies heavily on a three-year 25% royalty discount in order to compete with other imported timbers. I understand imported pine can be landed in Australia for only \$350 to \$400 per cubic metre compared with returns from \$2,000 to \$10,000 for native hardwoods. What long-term effect will your Government shift from a diversified industry, which includes the lucrative hardwood industry, or an industry that is primarily reliant on the highly competitive pine market and what sort of effect will that have on both royalty returns to the Government and on the profitability of the Queensland timber industry?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I have with me our newly appointed Executive Director for Forestry, Mr Ron Beck. He was just appointed last week. I will ask him to respond.

**Mr BECK:** You may well be aware that we have made a large commitment to the hoop pine industry, initially through royalty reductions equivalent to 25%, supported by a market repositioning program. In the face of sustained competition, both domestic and international, those remedies were actually extended for a three-year period until 2002. The whole strategy there is to ensure that the proud legacy, history and tradition that hoop pine has in Queensland will be maintained into the future and it will be retained as a premium product. I am sorry, Minister, I did not understand the connection with the hardwood industry.

**Mr COOPER:** The fact that the returns for hardwood when compared with softwood are much, much greater. That is the point. What we are looking at here is the effect of royalties and returns to Government on the reduction that you have given. That is okay. We are saying that it is good, but we want to know the effect on the Government Budget from that and also on the profitability of the Queensland timber industry knowing that they are competing in a very low market compared with a lucrative market in native hardwoods.

**Mr BECK:** I believe I understand what you are saying now. Let me first assure you that the strategies put in place for the hoop pine repositioning exercise are fully factored into DPI Forestry's budget. In fact, the strategies put in place were largely neutral because in itself the strategy ensured that the uptake of hoop pine would be maintained, whereas the alternate strategy—if we did not put those remedies in place, it was guaranteed that the uptake would be reduced. The joint strategies between ourselves as grower and industry as value adder has essentially underpinned both the industry profitability and Government's revenues through the sale of hoop pine. In terms of the connection with hardwoods, essentially they occupy different segments in the marketplace.

**Mr COOPER:** They do. I am aware of it. It is just that there are far greater returns obviously in the hardwood industry, but I will come back to that later.

**Mr BECK:** I could refer, if you wish, to some of the value adding strategies that are proposed, and it is intended through the RFA package to support those value adding strategies. Whilst I have not personally been involved with some of the industry development components of that—that is largely being managed through the Department of State Development—commitment has been made of some \$10m to that strategy and immediately \$80,000 has been provided to support a feasibility study for a consortium of millers looking at value adding of hardwood. I believe that is the future for the hardwood industry. If they are going to maintain a robust presence in the marketplace into the future, that is the direction they were heading and the Government will support it.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 12, dot point four of the MPS, mention is made of the innovative use of trained sniffer dogs for detecting chemical residues. Can you explain where this program is up to now?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, let me just say that the program is progressing quite successfully. The department is in the process now of training up its third sniffer dog. At present we have operating Norm, who is involved in chlorine residue, Jess, who is more involved in the wool industry, and the new dog who is being trained up—I am not too sure of its name, but it will come back to me before I finish the answer.

Let us get back to Norm. He was our initial sniffer dog and he is also our greatest star. With his handler, Greg Horricks, he visited approximately 100 livestock properties

throughout Queensland in the past year. They have proved to be an excellent tool for identifying organochlorine contamination in the field, having a detection accuracy of 98%. A second organochlorine sniffer dog, whose name comes back to me now, Mel, has commenced training and is expected to be fully imprinted by December 1999. It is planned to have Mel and his handler fully field operational by the end of the year 2000. I met Mel when I launched a pet program at a local school in Brisbane. I mentioned Jess, our wool sniffer dog. She has also been trained for detecting chemicals in wool. Her future role is currently under negotiation with the wool industry. As a result of these activities, livestock properties are more accurately able to identify sites requiring management to prevent organochlorine contamination. These trained dogs play a vital innovative role in strengthening Queensland's claims as a clean, green producer of food and fibre. Over the coming years, the program will develop strategies to broaden producer access to this technology.

A total of \$420,000 has been allocated to that program over four years in supporting the green initiative of the 1998-99 budget. As Mr Cooper and all our beef producers would know, in the past detection of OC residues in beef has threatened our beef export markets. Wool residues will increasingly impede market access. This is a very innovative way that the department is attempting to overcome those problems. The success rate that I have indicated to the Committee—98% with Norm—is an indication of how successful the program is.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** What breed of dog are the sniffer dogs?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Poor old Mel—we cannot even determine what sort of breed he is. Norm is a labrador. Jess is a border collie.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 35 paragraph 3 of the MPS, mention is made of the resources that support the beef enterprises. How has the department resolved the dispute with the Red Meat Advisory Council regarding the ownership of the Belmont research station and the Brian Pastures research station?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This issue has been around for quite some time. Negotiations have been proceeding on this issue, with the Red Meat Advisory Council indicating that earlier proposals did not entail sufficient cash transfer to RMAC. An agreement in principle has been reached that will see the retention for beef cattle research of effective and viable areas of

land plus associated infrastructure at both the Brian Pastures and the Belmont research stations. In the end, RMAC agreed to a total price of \$4m, which represents at least a \$2.5m discount below the likely return if both properties were sold as commercial operations. The agreement is yet to be formalised. We have Greg Robbins here from our beef institute. He has been very involved in the negotiations. I will pass it onto him now.

**Mr ROBBINS:** I am the Director of the Queensland Beef Industry Institute, which is based in Rockhampton. As the Minister said, this has been a long process. I guess the outcome of it represents a significant example of industry working together with Government to get a resolution. We now have a situation in which the Red Meat Advisory Council has agreed in principle with a steering committee comprising industry and Government universities in Queensland. The agreement in principle is yet to be formalised. That will see ownership of the stations transfer to Agforce Queensland. The cattle on both properties will be sold either to us in the case of Brian Pastures or to the CSIRO in the case of Belmont. We will also have significant funds coming from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and also from industry through the sale of property in Toowoomba. At the end of the day when this is finally really resolved and we have an agreement, we will see a good example of a resolution that meets the needs of all parties.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 12, dot point 10, of the MPS, animal welfare standards are mentioned. The need for new or modernised legislation for animal welfare has been intimated in the last budget. Can you please outline the position for the current budget?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The department's \$645,000 animal welfare program is designed to meet the needs of Queensland into the future. The existing Animals Protection Act 1925, which has major shortcomings, will be replaced with a new Animal Care and Protection Act. The new Act will promote the responsible treatment of animals through a duty of care on all individuals and organisations who use or interact with animals for any purpose. It will impose tougher penalties for those who are cruel. These penalties will range up to a maximum of \$20,000 and/or two years' imprisonment for an individual and \$100,000 for a corporation. These measures will send a strong signal that cruelty to animals is unacceptable.

Under the proposed legislation, enforcement will be strengthened through the appointment of DPI stock inspectors and veterinarians as welfare inspectors. These officers are situated throughout Queensland and will provide a greater coverage for welfare than has been available in the past. As it is important to inform people about proper welfare standards, the new Act will also be able to define acceptable standards of animal care and use. It will also provide a means to ensure that these standards are followed.

The department is developing an extensive program for the livestock industries to give them an understanding of the national welfare standards that will be recognised in the legislation. I would also like to inform the Committee that the Department of Primary Industries is the lead agency for animal welfare in Queensland. We are in the process now of drafting this new Animal Care and Protection Act to replace the out of date Animal Protection Act of 1925. The current legislative timetables indicate that the Bill is likely to be introduced to the Parliament early next year. We are trying to get it in towards the end of this year, but we do not know whether we will be able to achieve that. It will be early next year at the latest. I think that is good news for Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It certainly sounds like good news.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is good news for Norm, Jess and Mel.

**The CHAIRMAN:** My question relates to page 17, dot point 8, of the MPS, which notes the increasing numbers of rural industry development partnerships. What outcomes are being achieved from the rural industry development partnerships?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Department of Primary Industries has a strong commitment to the partnership approach in rural economic development. Through the rural partnership initiative it is helping a wide range of rural industry and community groups to build their capacity to manage change by focusing on future diversification and new market opportunities, a "help them to help themselves" approach. Currently there are six rural partnership officers across the State working directly with 45 groups and providing support to many others. Those staff members facilitate groups to identify their issues and assets, develop and implement their strategies, identify and develop their skills and access appropriate expertise. I will ask Devinka, Acting Executive Director of RIBS, to continue the answer.

**Ms WANIGESEKERA:** The partnership project within the Rural Industry Business Services is an important component of what our group does. Following on from what the Minister has outlined, some of the significant outcomes being achieved by this group include new market identification and access, new food and fibre product development, cooperative arrangements to ensure supply to new markets, increased focus on consumer trends and the need to work the paddock to plate, improved risk management through diversification—both within agriculture and into other industries—structural adjustment of non-viable enterprises and industries, better use of technology and information in decision making and more flexible business structures.

As strategies and projects develop, the partnership officers ensure the groups are linked with other agencies and stakeholders to gain support. The partnership officers are an important point of contact for rural industries and communities in terms of the whole-of-Government service delivery. In terms of Rural Industry Business Services, the partnership officers feed into other areas of our group, for instance, the trade officers. We work with alliances to bring groups together to develop their skills and determine where they are headed. The trade officers then take it over to look at market opportunities.

I would like to give you some examples of our work in that area. We have worked with the north Queensland goat meat producers up in north Queensland. This group works in partnership with DPI, DSD and the Burdekin ag college to promote and develop goat meat production. Another good example is the Theodore women's cotton group. This is a group of cotton farmers' wives who have formed, with facilitation help from DPI, to gather information and provide personal development training and education programs. In the west region we are working with a group called Agriculture Enterprise Exploration. This is a small group of producers who have formed a partnership with officers from within RIBS to investigate the possibilities for diversification in the area of western Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, dot point 7 on page 12 of the MPS states that the concept of a National Livestock Identification System was progressed. The NLIS is considered to be an important industry/Government initiative in relation to food safety. What action is the department taking to facilitate the implementation of this scheme?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think the honourable member has basically identified the fact that

this initiative is industry driven and it is getting the full support of Government. I think that is a very important point to make. As part of that industry initiative, the Beef Industry Development Advisory Council, or BIDAC as it is more commonly referred to, and the Animal and Plant Health Service of the DPI have been jointly coordinating the introduction of the NLIS in Queensland through a consultative and educational process. It is planned to have the NLIS operational in Queensland quite shortly to cater for new cattle identification requirements associated with export markets, particularly the European Union, where traceability of product has become of paramount importance.

A consultative group of stakeholders, together with an implementation committee under BIDAC, has been developing and are implementing strategies for a roll-out of the scheme later on this year. \$30,000 in new initiative funding has been contributed by the department to a joint study with the processing industry on NLIS systems development issues, in particular data collection and feedback for management and Government purposes.

The implementation of this scheme has resulted largely from decisions taken by what was the residues management group and is now known as Safemeat. It is a national industry initiative facilitated by the State and Commonwealth Governments. Animal and product traceability under current systems has been found to be inadequate for modern market demands.

**The CHAIRMAN:** On page 17, at dot point 4 of the MPS you mention aligning the RIBS services with the needs of industry sectors by developing partnerships and networks of clients. How does the DPI call centre contribute to the priorities of the Government and at the same time service the primary industries sector of Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This service provides more jobs for Queenslanders and at the same time contributes to the Government's priority of skilling Queensland as the Smart State, while also providing a toll free call guarantee from anywhere in Queensland. The DPI call centre, which was launched on 1 July 1997, has already received more than 140,000 calls. I remember quite vividly being there in the call centre to take the 100,000th phone call from a producer in, I think, the Lockyer Valley. This call centre has now received more than 140,000 calls, with the maximum daily call rate being 440. Eighty-two per cent of all calls are answered by the DPI call centre within 30 seconds, with the average speed of call

answer being 15 seconds. To further report on this great initiative of the department, I will ask Mr Graham Dawson to continue.

**Mr DAWSON:** The DPI call centre is a finalist in the Premier's Awards this year for service to rural and regional Queensland. The DPI call centre was named Australia's best call centre of any size in customer service delivery in 1998. It was also one of three finalists in the category in the State awards earlier this year.

The DPI call centre also provides information services to the Department of Mines and Energy. Thus, we are ensuring that the high standards already attained by one Government agency are utilised by another. This also enables people in rural and remote areas of the State to access Government information at a time that suits them, the customer.

DPI is negotiating to extend its call centre services to other Government departments and is having discussions with the Environmental Protection Agency about providing a similar arrangement to that it has with DME, which is a fee for service arrangement. DPI is also discussing with the Department of Natural Resources how the two agencies, which have common clients, might combine to provide an information service which is called a cluster call centre. This capitalises on the work already done by DPI and might well lead to savings to the taxpayer by not doubling up on the purchase of expensive information technology.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Basically what we are saying is that it is a very successful service. The department is very proud of its service and we are looking at extending its use to other agencies within Government.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. It certainly sounds very impressive. I now call the member for Crows Nest.

**Mr COOPER:** Further to my question on notice No. 5 regarding the Government's proposed south-east Queensland regional forest agreement, which will gradually close down the hardwood industry, I understand that the Government will be purchasing Boral's timber operations to shut the Nandroya sawmill and the Cooroy board plant, shedding at least 80 jobs. Boral recently signed a \$13.5m joint venture agreement with Forestry Tasmania and a consortium of Japanese investors to create 7,500 hectares of new hardwood plantation estates in Tasmania over the next 15 years. What steps have you taken to ensure that Queensland taxpayers' money used to shut down Boral's Queensland

operations will be invested in this State rather than in Tasmania?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I start by reinforcing the fact that on 16 September this year the Queensland Government, the timber industry and conservationists signed an historic agreement to protect jobs, regional communities and Crown native forests in south-east Queensland—I think we all know the other benefits that this agreement will deliver—which basically means continuation of native forest harvesting by existing mills at their current volumes for the next 25 years. That, of course, is with the exception, as the honourable member has said, of Boral's mill near Cooroy. It will also include Finlayson's mill at Yarraman and the Hyne and Sons mill at Dingo.

Detailed resource modelling confirms that adequate timber is available over the next 25 years to support the plan. Over 471 new jobs in the region will be created to offset the 80 potential job losses in Noosa's immediate hinterland. I believe that this will be a seamless transition over 25 years to a hardwood industry based on plantations, supported by a comprehensive R and D program.

In this regard it is interesting to note that the Commonwealth Government recently released a paper titled Opportunities for Hardwood Plantation Development in South-east Queensland that fully supports the feasibility of the 25-year plantation strategy. I will now ask Mr Ron Beck to further add to my answer.

**Mr BECK:** From my discussions with the manager of the Timber Board, I think it was accepted by the Timber Board that if there were going to be reductions in the availability of timber in any outcome it would have put in jeopardy the whole industry. The strategy was obviously supported by Boral to move out of the industry.

**Mr COOPER:** It would. Take the money and run!

**Mr BECK:** Obviously, that was a commercial decision by Boral. What it did deliver was the ongoing security of the remaining members of the industry, as the Minister has outlined there, for 25 years. I believe that is in the overall benefit of both the industry and the community.

**Mr COOPER:** That is a matter of opinion. Obviously, we do not support the proposals of the Queensland Timber Board, either. But back to the question. We mentioned the shedding of at least 80 jobs as a result of that and the \$13.5m joint venture that Boral have

entered into with Tasmania. So what I am saying is that, as far as the Queensland taxpayer is concerned, what steps are you taking to ensure that we do not see repeats of Boral, for instance, taking off to Tasmania? If we are going to have some payouts, which we are seeing, perhaps that money could be spent—or guaranteed to be spent—in Queensland, rather than just: take the money and run. What initiatives do you have to ensure that those funds are going to stay here? We talk about employment. I know we have heard it all before, whether it be in north Queensland, Wide Bay, Maryborough and those places, where they have turned them into three-fingered waiters, and catching butterflies, and all of that. Of course, it did not work; it did not happen. We can see the same thing happening here again. What I am asking is: are there any constructive, concrete ideas and initiatives in order to keep those funds here in the State and actually do something useful with them?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** On the issue of employment, the honourable member mentioned a loss of 80 jobs, but there will be an additional 471 new jobs proposed in private sector softwood milling and value adding, 241 jobs at the MDF plant at Gympie, 30 jobs in plantation and management and 100 jobs in conservation management, as well.

In the plantation development area, we are embarking on the plantation of 10 million trees over five years as part of an \$18m softwood and hardwood plantation program and the establishment of a hardwood timber research and extension program. We have also put together an incentives package to encourage new investment in hardwood value adding. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the Government has already committed \$80,000 to support a value adding feasibility study involving a number of mills. Investment is already starting to flow based on the security provided by the Government's plan—and "security" is the operative word. The security is there now for 25 years.

On the conservation side, we have an immediate addition of 425,000 hectares to double the State's conservation estate. In support of the agreement, the Queensland Government has committed in excess of \$80m over the next four years to ensure that this is going to happen.

**Mr COOPER:** Minister, further on that and your Government's proposed RFA, which is referred to on page 66, you would be aware of the Australian forest standard currently being developed by the Ministerial Council on Forest,

Fisheries and Agriculture in response to growing international demands for sustainable timber production and the increasingly difficult access to some markets on that basis. Under your plan, hardwood sawmillers will now draw their existing wood entitlements from only 100,000 hectares—remember that 425,000 extra have been taken out—and plantations will be established after that, or during the next 25 years, and pigs might fly. Nevertheless, are you satisfied, Minister, that the intensity of that lobbying activity will enable those millers to satisfy the sustainability criteria of the Australian forestry standard and to be able to sell their timber into the future—coming off 100,000 hectares of stuff that has already been cut out, anyway?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the outset, let me just say that the Timber Board would not have signed the agreement unless they were confident that they would be able to have a continuity of supply. In relation to your comment about "pigs might fly"—when the Government is committed to a very intensive plantation regime of both hardwood and softwood timbers, I believe that the target set by the Government is very achievable and, at the end of the day, I believe that we will have a sustainable timber industry in Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** Native hardwoods—where are these plantations going to be?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will get to that. We are going to maintain a sustainable timber industry in Queensland. In relation to the research program for hardwood plantations and areas identified for hardwood plantations, I will ask Mr Ron Beck, Executive Director of Forestry for our department, to respond to that.

**Mr BECK:** An interdepartmental group involving DPI, State Development and DNR has been set up to deliver on this plantation development strategy. The areas that we are looking at specifically in terms of your question there, Mr Cooper—

**Mr COOPER:** Plantations and where they are going to be?

**Mr BECK:** Yes. Coincidentally, virtually identical with what was identified in that study referred to by the Minister, called Opportunities for Hardwood Plantation Development in South East Queensland, which was released in September 1999—only a couple weeks ago—by the Bureau of Rural Sciences and the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics, what they identified there were three primary subregions: Bundaberg/Gladstone, Gympie and Brisbane. Just to complete what was said there—at the

end of their summary they said, "Expansion of softwood plantations and the development of hardwood plantations are both feasible in the Gympie and Brisbane subregions"—obviously, they are the southern subregions—"whereas there are opportunities for a new plantation industry based on hardwoods in the Bundaberg and Gladstone subregion.

**Mr COOPER:** That gives us a clue. But what area in hectares? Because 425,000 hectares have been taken out, are we putting 400,000-odd back, or is it just 10,000 or something like that?

**Mr BECK:** What the Government has identified to date, in terms of the Government plan, is that 10,000 trees will be established—

**Mr COOPER:** 10 million, I think.

**Mr BECK:** 10 million.

**Mr COOPER:** That is over 10,000 hectares, I think.

**Mr BECK:** It is indeed, if you work on something like 1,000 trees per hectare.

**Mr COOPER:** When 425,000 hectares are being taken out, and with 10,000 hectares replacing that, you have to be a little bit sceptical. Minister, firstly, at the Estimates hearings on Friday relating to your colleague—and further to your reply to my question on notice No. 5—the Minister for Natural Resources referred to the addition of 425,000 hectares of Crown native forest to reserve. He also stated that it is likely that a large proportion of that area will be designated to national park at some time in the future. They contain a lot of grazing leases. So how will those leases be affected by the decision? What will be the impact and viability of those leaseholders? And what programs will your Government be undertaking to maintain their viability?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I would like to answer that question, but I think that is a matter for the Minister for Natural Resources to determine.

**Mr COOPER:** We are not going to get an answer from him. I thought you might be a bit better than that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will have a yarn to you in private.

**Mr COOPER:** I am sure you will. Minister, I just want to go back to some of the other areas that we developed before. I was concerned about the DPI's primary role in animal and plant health, pest and disease surveillance and control, and maintenance and expansion of export market access. You have certainly been doing a lot of travelling and

good work in that regard. I refer to page 11 of the MPS and the extremely competitive international market. As you know, we have talked about the clean and green status, all of which we support. I acknowledge that the papaya fruit fly eradication campaign has been wound down; and acknowledging that you did not do so well out of the Budget, however, in this area, why has some \$9m been cut from the APHS budget?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I have here Mr Kevin Dunn, who is the executive director of that area. I will ask him to respond, and then I might add a few points later.

**Mr DUNN:** The APHS budget, as it is reflected in the MPS referred to by Mr Cooper, mostly reflects the wind-down in the papaya fruit fly program. The 1998-99 budget figure, as stated in the document, was not required because of the success of the program in that year. The actual budget referred to and used in that program was \$40,880,000. A comparison of the actual for 1998-99 with the estimate for 1999-2000 reflects a difference of approximately \$5m.

Just taking the line items of those two comparisons of columns, the first line refers to payments for outputs. This mainly relates to the reduction in the papaya fruit fly program because of the success of the program. There will be minimal activity in that area in 1999-2000; in fact, there is just a small amount now being used to basically write off the program.

The next line refers to user charges. The differences which are reflected there show the reduction in revenues receipted from other State Governments and from the Commonwealth Government due to the winding up of the program. Mr Cooper will recall that this was a national program and that there was national funding from the Commonwealth and each of the States. That particular figure reflects the reduction in revenues from those sources.

The next line refers to grants and contributions. This indicates the reduction in the anticipated number of incidents occurring under the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance program. That is the main reason for the reduction there. This program is basically the ongoing monitoring of bovine tuberculosis since the declaration of eradication in Australia. There is expected to be a very small number of sporadic single cases in the five or 10 years subsequent to the declaration of eradication, and that is principally funded through that particular appropriation.

Other revenues are basically similar across the two columns. This shows the

accounts from the Banana Industry Protection Board which appear wholly within the APHS budget this year, whereas previously they appeared jointly in the APHS and the Agriculture Industry Development budgets.

**Mr COOPER:** Thank you. Our clean, green status is so important and I would have thought that our disease control and surveillance should at least have been maintained, or even boosted, if we are going to put our money where our mouth is, so to speak. This raises concerns with me that these budget cuts might force the DPI into continuing to pursue the introduction of full cost recovery for services to producers on issues such as tick clearance. As you will be aware, Minister, that is a current hot topic. This may force the DPI to continue to impose costs on people using tick clearance facilities.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Before I come to that: you made an assertion that funding for surveillance has been reduced in the Department of Primary Industries. That is not quite true.

**Mr COOPER:** Again, we will agree to disagree.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The 1998-99 figure was \$8,724,000. The 1999-2000 is \$8,954,000. So there is an increase there. I can assure the Committee that there will be no reduction in services in that area.

**Mr COOPER:** Reduction in money but not in services.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The next question you asked was in relation to cattle tick clearances and overtime payments?

**Mr COOPER:** That is right.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Unfortunately, despite extensive consultation I cannot get any industry agreement regarding the provision of weekend tick clearance services.

**Mr COOPER:** You will still charge them.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There seems to be a differing body of opinion.

**Mr COOPER:** The people who do not use the facilities do not care. The people who use the facilities do care. That is why you will not get agreement.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is not true.

**Mr COOPER:** It is.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We have undertaken some research and we have held meetings throughout the State in relation to this matter, and that is not true at all. Industry views range from the opinion that all services should be provided free by the Government to the view

that services should be provided mainly on a cost recovery basis. This has basically left the Government in the very difficult position where any decision will meet with opposition from some sectors of industry. You will understand that. Therefore, with this background, I plan to make a decision that is in the best long-term interests of the industry and the Queensland community, and this basically includes placing priorities on activities, such as animal health surveillance to support market access and animal welfare—which is what you asked before—and less emphasis on endemic disease control, such as cattle ticks. Before I can announce a decision I will have to take it to Government.

**Mr COOPER:** And, as you say, with full consultation. What concerns me is that the people on the tick line, as we know it, are the people who hold the line against all the rest.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes.

**Mr COOPER:** They are the ones who protect the clean areas, and they are the ones who pay and cop it in the neck. They are also the ones who are involved in the live cattle exports. They like to use those facilities. You do not do it only between the hours of 9 and 5 on Mondays to Fridays. It is on seven days, 24 hours a day. You pay overtime in the areas of boating and fisheries. The same should be done with regard to stock inspectors, seven days a week. This will allow for continuity in service. We have talked about this matter before. Please understand that those on the line are the ones who cop it and who have to pay. Therefore, I do not think that they should be in the gun. That is the point I make.

With regard to Animal and Plant Health Services, which is referred to on page 11 of the MPS, reference is made to DPI's involvement in eradicating the recent Newcastle disease outbreaks in New South Wales. I do not see any reference in the budget to the costs incurred by your department. They were certainly costly outbreaks, as we all know. I need to know the cost of sending departmental staff to those outbreaks. Can you inform the Committee of the costs incurred by Queensland in relation to cleaning up these outbreaks under the National Cost Sharing Agreement? Has the Government considered transferring the funding responsibilities for such outbreaks to Treasury rather than you people having to pay for it?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I wish it was true.

**Mr COOPER:** Have you considered it?

Obviously Treasury should be paying. Your budget should not be affected by something that occurs from time to time.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Point taken. During the past 12 months, eradication of the serious poultry disease, Newcastle disease, has been attempted near Sydney at St Mary's and Schofields and near Gosford—more commonly referred to as Mangrove Mountain. It is believed that all three outbreaks involved a similar virus. The virus has mutated from an existing non-virulent Newcastle disease virus circulating in poultry flocks, rather than having been introduced from overseas.

This represents the largest animal disease emergency response in Australian history, with over 2 million birds destroyed, and has cost Governments in excess of \$20m. Queensland has contributed 9% of all costs involved, as well as a large number of trained staff such as veterinarians, inspectors and scientists. If future outbreaks occur, the stamp-out approach used to date will be modified to allow lower-cost options, such as high temperature processing of birds and vaccination, to be used. To get to the specifics, I will ask Mr Kevin Dunn to continue.

**Mr DUNN:** Mr Cooper, there has been a progressive invoicing of the National Cost Sharing Agreement in relation to this matter from the New South Wales Government. At this stage, all the costs for that outbreak have not yet been invoiced. As the Minister has said, the estimated cost overall of the Newcastle disease outbreak in the financial year 1998-99 is approximately \$20m, of which Queensland has a 9% share. At this stage, Queensland has already paid several hundred thousand dollars of that component and has identified a figure of \$843,000 in the allocations for 1999-2000 to continue those payments as advice is progressively received from New South Wales. This has been a nationally cost-shared exercise, that is, the Commonwealth is funding 50% of the exercise and the States collectively fund the other 50%, of which in toto Queensland pays 9%.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much. I call the member for Greenslopes.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, at page 31, dot point 13, of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, you mention the appointment of a chief scientist to reinforce research, development and extension investment and advance Queensland's animal and plant product industries. Minister, what has the DPI done to reinforce research, development and extension investment and advance

Queensland's animal and plant product issues?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Before I get to that answer, in relation to the 425,000 hectares that are going to be taken into reserve as a result of the RFA agreement, the honourable member for Crows Nest took a cheap shot. I need to point out to the Committee that only a small percentage of that 425,000 hectares is actually being logged. So if you take into account a 10,000 hectare plantation regime where all the timber there will be logged, you cannot really make the comparison between the 425,000 hectares reserve and the 10,000 hectare plantation reserve. I just thought that I had better make that point.

**Mr COOPER:** Can I make a quick response?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is fine.

**Mr COOPER:** It was not a cheap shot. The 425,000 actually is coming out; it is just the 10,000 hectares. As we have said, the smaller timber towns are going to have to travel a very, very big distance to reach those whereas they have access to it right now, or they did have. That is the point that I make: the distance will be a killer for them.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think that you will find that there is agreement among all the parties that this is the best outcome possible for the timber industry in Queensland.

**Mr COOPER:** Again, I cannot agree with you.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Okay. I remember what the question was. In accord with the policy, "Let's get Queensland moving again—Labor's commitment to primary industries", the department created the position of chief scientist. Of course, as I have informed the Committee previously, we have appointed Dr Joe Baker to that position. Currently, the Queensland Food and Fibre Science and Innovation Council is being established and will be the Queensland Government's principal source of advice on issues in science and innovation in food and fibre. The role of the council will be to ensure that innovations in food and fibre are highlighted and promoted for the benefit of all Queenslanders. The council will advise the Government on strategic priorities and facilitate alliances with research organisations in Australia and overseas. It will also ensure that the Government's investment delivers the right mix of social, economic and environmental outcomes for Queensland.

The membership of the council will bring together the best in Queensland food and

fibre science technology and innovation. It will include eminent scientists, industry and community representatives. Dr Joe Baker, the department's chief scientist, will be the executive chairman of this council. I believe that the establishment of this council will certainly give our department, the Queensland Government and Queenslanders in particular that much-needed shot in the arm to really get our primary industries moving.

**Mr FENLON:** According to page 11, dot point 16, of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements, Northwatch activities have commenced. Minister, can you outline what successes have been achieved as a result of the funding provided for the Northwatch program?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** For those members who are not aware, I inform the Committee that the Northwatch program is a Department of Primary Industries initiative to increase surveillance for pests and diseases in plants and animals and improve outbreak response in remote areas of Cape York and Torres Strait. In 1998-99, the budget was \$1.07m, and \$1.2m is planned for the 1999-2000 year.

The Northwatch project is now fully operational with staff based at Cairns, Townsville, Coen, Normanton and Mareeba. The only centre that I have not visited yet is Normanton. I must get there. An operational plan has been developed in consultation with industry and community representatives and endorsed by the Department of Primary Industries. All staff have undertaken cross-cultural training to equip them for work with the Cape York and Torres Strait communities. The Coen information and inspection centre now operates up to 16 hours a day throughout the year at a cost of \$400,000 a year. Just a few months ago, I was fortunate enough to have the privilege of opening that centre.

In 1998-99, 8,821 vehicles, 1,166 animals, and 7,418 kilograms of fruit were inspected. In 1998-99, AQIS contributed \$100,000 to the operation of the centre and will repeat this contribution for this year. These activities have enhanced awareness among travellers and local residents and provide additional security against the spread of pests and diseases. Northwatch surveillance has led to detections of cotton rust at Cooktown, tomato leaf curl virus on Cape York Peninsula and spiralling white fly in Cairns and Townsville. In March 1999, Northwatch staff successfully eradicated banana black Sigatoka at Bamaga and subsequently on Thursday Island. They also control papaya fruit fly in the Torres Strait Islands using an intensive blocking program

similar to that used successfully in the earlier Cairns outbreak. Before I close, I would like to pay tribute to Neil Sing, who was in charge of the Northwatch program. I think that he is in another position of the department. He really led that program really well and a lot of our success is due to his hard work.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, at the last dot point on page 7 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements mention is made of sustainable development, including vegetation and water management. Minister, since farmers are the biggest users of natural resources, what is the department going to do to ensure that there is no further degradation of our natural resource base?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I thank the honourable member for the question. This is a very, very important issue. Our Government is committed to ecologically sustainable development and our Government takes that commitment seriously. ESD does not stifle development but ensures that it is in harmony with our natural environment, benefits the whole community, and stays within socially acceptable levels. The department has a major role to play in developing farming systems that fit within the ESD framework and then working with farmers to encourage their adoption as normal farm management practices.

The department's research and development work in agriculture, forestry and land use integrates environmentally friendly and socially acceptable elements along with those relating to economic viability. Codes of practices have been developed for many industries in sugar, horticulture, forestry and rangelands management and more are being developed. Peter Neville, would you like to add to those comments?

**Mr NEVILLE:** The important emphasis that we are placing on this as a department is to attempt to get the balance right between protection and conservation and, obviously, production. To do that, we need to work fairly closely with industry and we are doing that by assisting with codes of practice and developing those codes with industry to try to operationalise what is a generic concept of ESD—ecologically sustainable development—into how that gets applied within industries.

An important element of that is attempting to quantify the economic costs that sometimes impose on production systems for an overall community benefit. That is where the department has a particular role to play in working with industries and across other departments—the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Natural

Resources—to attempt to get that balance right. So that has been our main focus in trying to operationalise ESD and sustainable agriculture practices.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 45, paragraph 1, of the MPS I note your department's contribution to the growth and development of Queensland's diverse horticultural industry, including the ornamental industry. With the increased focus on food and fibre and the formation of the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, what assistance will your department continue to provide to the Queensland nursery and associated industries?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The department has not forgotten the importance of the amenity in environmental horticulture, which is made of the following peak bodies: the Queensland Nursery Industry Association, the Queensland Flower Growers Association, the Queensland Association of Landscape Industries, the Park and Leisure Association and the turf industry. The value to Queensland of this rapidly expanding sector is approximately \$480m, with over 13,000 people directly employed.

The department has just completed the most extensive survey ever conducted to identify the current impediments limiting Queensland nursery exports. A series of step-by-step guides to help first-time businesses export live plants is due to be launched shortly. To further support this initiative, the department has also significantly expanded its information service to the nursery industry and has undertaken an export ready scheme to improve the capacity of industry to rapidly respond to export opportunities. I will ask Dr Ken Jackson to add to my answer.

**Dr JACKSON:** The institute services the amenity industry from our Redlands research station. The department has recently undertaken a partnership agreement with the Queensland Flower Growers Association, QFGA, to establish a full-time executive office for the association. This strategy aims to provide appropriate whole-of-industry support to Queensland to improve the long-term sustainability and coordination of their peak body. Since this initiative was undertaken, in the last six months QFGA membership has more than doubled.

The DPI at the Redlands research station is also assisting Queensland nursery industries in the export of live plant product by undertaking hundreds of pest and pathogen tests of export product and maintaining constant nursery inspections to ensure sustainable export markets. Also, there is no

dedicated turf research facility in Australia north of Melbourne at this time. To address this deficiency, the DPI's Queensland Horticulture Institute has invested approximately \$200,000 to set up a turf research group within the Amenity and Environmental Horticulture program at Redlands. The potential to export new subtropical grass species that are either salt or shade tolerant to Asia and the Middle East countries has enormous potential.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 42, paragraph 5, of the MPS indicates that a major pest to field crops and horticulture in Queensland is heliothis. What is the department doing to combat this pest?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Department of Primary Industries has increased the research development and extension effort towards improved management of heliothis in response to the problems encountered by crop producers in Queensland with very positive outcomes to date, including new staff appointments. The Queensland Government's initiative Supporting Green Industries—Combating Heliothis has injected \$2.38m over four years to expand the research effort. New funding linkages exist with industry research and development corporations. Parts of the new initiative include a novel options unit, a chemical ecology unit, a biopesticides unit and a field ecology unit with linkages with the University of Queensland, the University of New England, CSIRO and New South Wales agriculture.

Community pest management programs area wide or regional management strategies have been introduced into several crop producing districts in Queensland. They have been successful in reducing insecticide dependence for heliothis management. I think this can be best demonstrated by what is happening in the Emerald district, where all cotton growers took part in the DPI program to put in some crop trapping. I will not explain it to the committee because I do not have enough time. However, that program has worked and it has really reduced the amount of chemicals that the producers had to use to combat the heliothis. This is part of the development and extension of activities that have really helped to increase industry awareness of the issues surrounding heliothis management, with particular emphasis on pest biology and ecology.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I turn to page 66, paragraph 8, of the MPS where plans for the worldwide commercialisation of the wollemi pine are mentioned. How will the joint DPI

Forestry and Birkdale Nursery wollemi pine project impact on Queensland's exports?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is a very exciting project that has been put together by the Department of Primary Industries in collaboration with the Birkdale Nursery. Before I give the Committee a detailed response, I would like to add a point of clarification about the Operating Statement on page 57. Mr Cooper referred to that at the beginning of the debate and compared it to the Output Summary on page 5. I reassure the Committee that both totals are correct. The difference is that the amounts disclosed in the Operating Statement include that portion of the Corporate Services Agency costs. The CSA provides corporate services to the DPI, as well as the Department of Natural Resources, under a service level agreement. The costs relating to DNR service delivery have been excluded from the Output Summary on page 5, as the figures disclosed on page 5 represent costs associated with the delivery of the Department of Primary Industries outputs. Therefore, they are rightly excluded as CSA costs associated with the delivery of service to the Department of Natural Resources.

In 1997, the Royal Botanic Gardens called for expressions of interest in the rights to commercialise wollemi pine worldwide. The department's forestry branch and the Birkdale Nursery provided a joint proposal that the Royal Botanic Gardens accepted in late 1998. This proposal provides for the Department of Primary Industries Forestry and the Birkdale Nursery to gain exclusive rights to commercialise the wollemi pine worldwide for a period of around 15 years. The success of this project represents a notable example of cooperation between the Queensland Government, through the Department of Primary Industries, and local industry and promises to generate in the order of \$15m per annum in export earnings commencing around about the Year 2006. Not only will this project generate valuable export earnings, it will also create local employment and generate international recognition for Queensland's role in the conservation of this rare and endangered species. The wollemi pine is a near relation to Queensland's hoop pine. It is a rare primitive tree discovered in 1994, 150 kilometres north-west of Sydney. That is as close as we will get, because the location is still a closely guarded secret.

At the end of the day, this means that our researchers within the Forestry branch of the Department of Primary Industries are as good if not better than researchers anywhere else in the world. What they have done with the

wollemi pine is world-first research. With that expertise, I am quite sure that when our researchers continue their work into developing new hybrids for the hardwood plantation industry, their research into the wollemi pine and into producing hybrids in the softwood plantation area will serve them well. That is why I have all the confidence in the world that we will be able to achieve our target of successfully growing hardwood plantations within 25 years.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much, Minister, for that very informative answer. On page 17, paragraph 1, of the MPS mention is made of RIBS close links with the private sector companies in export and infrastructure in national and international supply chains. What is the current trade situation in regard to Queensland's trading partners affected by the so-called Asian financial crisis?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You have asked a very detailed question. I might ask Devinka Wanigesequera to respond.

**Ms WANIGESEKERA:** An analysis of Queensland's top trading partners in 1997-98 reveals that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, representing the north Asian segment, and Indonesia and Malaysia—South East Asia—are all in the top 10 export destinations for Queensland purchased product. Although the Asian financial crisis commenced with Thailand in early 1997, the impact on Queensland did not become apparent until the Indonesian and Malaysian economies started to be affected in the middle of that year. A comparison of the food and fibre export trade figures for Queensland and its five most important Asian trading partners for the period between 1996-97, which was \$2.293 billion, and the 1998-99 financial years, which was at \$1.876 billion—those are preliminary figures—shows an initial fall of \$A450m in the first year to \$1.843 billion, followed by an improvement of \$33m to \$1.876 billion in 1998. The five-year food and fibre export trading average with our major market, Japan, stands at \$1.262 billion. If you look at the figures for 1997-98, \$1.277 billion, and the 1998-99 result of \$1.334 billion, you see that it compares favourably with this average. Japan receives about 70% of our Queensland food and fibre exports to Asian markets and Japan's growth for these exports, although gradual, has largely negated the overall effect of the downturn. Of the five leading Asian export trade partners, Indonesia appears to be the one that is showing the greatest negative effect in terms of export trade. It went down from \$325m in 1996-97 to \$202m in 1998-99. Again, those are preliminary figures. The

product areas showing the most impact are live cattle and horticulture, in addition to some of the other areas, such as meat, sugar, animal feedstuffs and dairy products. The only production area to show substantial growth is textile fibres, which is up from \$124m in 1995-96 to \$182m in 1998-99.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer you to paragraph 9 on page 45 of the 1999-2000 Ministerial Portfolio Statements. The paragraph states that the department is assisting Queensland horticulture industries to maintain and increase export markets. Following the Asian economic crisis in 1998, is the export market for mandarins and other citrus fruits still flat?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** If we all go back to the answer to the previous question, we will understand that we have had a few problems with the Asian countries. In particular, there were difficulties in our key mandarin markets in Asia in 1998. There has been some modest recovery in these key Asian markets. In addition, the Queensland citrus industry has moved to expand into other regional markets such as Canada. I am pleased to advise that, after some 12 years of research and negotiations on plant health concerns, Japanese quarantine authorities have approved the entry of Queensland mandarins to Japan from the 1999 season. The Queensland mandarin industry has responded quickly to the opening up of the Japanese market and in excess of 80,000 cartons of Queensland mandarins have been sold into the Japanese market in the 1999 season. Whilst our mandarin industry is currently analysing the results of its first season in Japan, there is confidence that Japan will become an important and valuable market. I invite Dr Ken Jackson to add to that.

**Dr JACKSON:** I think we owe a debt to the disinfestation team working out of Cairns, which helped to accomplish the export of mandarins to Japan. Last Thursday night, they were the recipients of a Premier's award for export assistance. Of the 10 prestigious awards made by the Premier that night, it was the only Government department that received an award.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much for those answers. The time allotted for the consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Primary Industries has now expired. I thank the Minister and also the portfolio officers for their attendance and all of the effort put into this process.

Sitting suspended from 11.49 a.m. to 11.59 a.m.

**ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER  
POLICY; WOMEN'S POLICY; AND FAIR TRADING****IN ATTENDANCE**

- Hon. J. C. Spence, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading
- Ms M. O'Donnell, Director-General
- Ms K. Tim, Executive Director, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development
- Ms U. Zeller, Acting Commissioner for Consumer Affairs
- Ms S. Belfrage, Executive Director, Office of Women's Policy
- Ms C. Mason, General Manager, Residential Tenancies Authority
- Mr M. Miller, General Manager, Queensland Building Services
- Mr T. Haralampou, Registrar/Manager, Queensland Building Tribunal
- Ms J. Archer, General Manager, Business and Executive Services, Department of Equity and Fair Trading
- Mr R. Schamburg, Manager, Financial Services, Business and Executive Services, Department of Equity and Fair Trading

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearings of Estimates G are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading. The time allotted is three hours. The Committee proposes to consider in the first hour the proposed expenditure for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development and the Office of Women's Policy. Following lunch, the Committee will consider the proposed expenditure for the Office of Fair Trading.

For the information of the Minister and witnesses, I point out that the time limit for questions is one minute and for answers it is three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after the extension of time has been given. The Sessional Orders

require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allotted to non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between Government and non-Government members. Also, in accordance with the Sessional Orders, each Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes. Again, a single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of that time limit. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question. I also ask that all mobile phones be switched off.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading to be open for examination. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, do you wish to make a short introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I would like to make an opening statement. As this Estimates Committee hearing is split into two sessions, I will be making two short introductory statements, the first on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Women's Policy and the second, at the beginning of session two, on Fair Trading, which includes the Office of Fair Trading, the Residential Tenancies Authority, the Queensland Building Services Authority and the Queensland Building Services Tribunal.

I now wish to introduce the officers from my department sitting at the table: the Director-General of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development and the Director-General of the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, Ms Marg O'Donnell; the Executive Director, Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, Kerrie Tim; the Executive Director, Office of Women's Policy, Stephanie Belfrage; the General Manager, Business and Executive Services, Jan Archer; the Manager, Financial Services, Business and Executive Services, Ross Schamburg.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development and the Office of Women's Policy share the goals

of better opportunities and quality of life for Queenslanders. They want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and women and girls to approach the next century with a new sense of confidence. To make this possible, both DATSIPD and the Office of Women's Policy have executed significant changes in policy direction during the first year of the Labor Government. They now have a keener focus on smart service to the people of Queensland. This attitude is manifest in the Budget for 1999-2000. In many ways, the DATSIPD budget of \$102.1m is a triumph for sound policy development during 1998-99. New funding initiatives include \$25.4m to compensate past Government employees for wage racism, \$5.8m for new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Council Chambers and \$12m for the new stores in the Torres Strait. Each of these initiative stems from compelling work by departmental staff in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These partnerships have been embodied in a new degree of trust from the communities. That trust has grown through the creation of a separate department with the clear brief of being the lead Government agency.

In line with the Labor Government's priorities, DATSIPD has distanced itself from the welfare model and worked on empowering communities. It supports and will continue to support successful initiatives emanating from the communities through the Local Justice Program. DATSIPD staff team with remote communities to deliver their essential water and sewerage infrastructure and encourage training and employment for local people. In a similar vein, staff work with local government to encourage accountable and appropriate community governance. DATSIPD joins with other Government agencies to promote a more equitable justice system as well as recognition and protection of culture and heritage.

Just as DATSIPD gives indigenous Queenslanders a stronger voice in Government, so the Office of Women's Policy promotes the interests of women and girls. In the past year it grew more receptive to a wider range of Queensland women. The views it brings to Government and translates into policy are now more inclusive and honest than under the previous administration. Working with an operating budget of \$4.1m in 1999-2000, the Office of Women's Policy will enhance a community partnership it builds. A series of community outreach forums, beginning with one in Logan this month, will be

central to this objective. The forums will involve the Premier's Council for Women, which has a budget of \$265,000 devoted primarily to employment issues. Like a highly successful round table meeting of women's organisations held in Brisbane last fiscal year, the forums will allow a diverse range of women to speak directly to me and to the Office of Women's Policy.

I want to take this opportunity to thank the staff of DATSIPD and the Office of Women's Policy for their proficiency in implementing Government priorities during our first year of Government. I would now welcome questions on the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy Development and the Office of Women's Policy.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first period of questions will begin with non-Government members. With leave of the Committee, the member for Maroochydore has joined the Committee.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Thank you very much, Minister, and your staff for your time. As the Minister responsible for women's policy, I refer the Minister to the New Directions statement of the Queensland Labor Party tabled in the House on 10 March 1998. In that document a policy commitment made to the electorate was that the budget will be increased in the area of domestic violence by \$2m per year to a total expenditure of \$5.5m. In the Ministerial Portfolio Statements accompanying the budget on pages 2-11 and 2-12, it is stated that your department administered in 1998-99 \$1m in domestic violence funds for innovative programs to assist women victims of DV in indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Further, in your proposed future developments you have committed just the \$1m domestic violence funding for innovative programs to assist women victims of DV which will be allocated through OWP to the DFYCC. Why is it that you have committed only \$1m in this areas against the stated policy declaration of an extra \$2m per year?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Office of Women's Policy has been allocated \$1m each year for four years to undertake specific domestic violence programs. The additional funding that the Government has promised and, indeed, has allocated to domestic violence has gone into the portfolio of my colleague the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care. The \$1m that was allocated to the Office of Women's Policy last year has been spent on new initiatives in domestic violence.

On becoming Minister, both for Aboriginal policy and women's policy, I quickly realised that I believe that indigenous domestic policy initiatives had been underfunded by previous Queensland Governments of all political persuasions. I made the decision to allocate approximately half of that \$1m funding to indigenous domestic violence programs, and that was administered by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy in the last year. We cannot in a short period of time hope to overcome past injustices and past underspending in the areas of domestic violence, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander domestic violence. But we have, with that allocation of an extra half a million dollars, attempted to fund a number of indigenous programs around this State that have previously been underfunded. I guess I am in a unique position as Minister for both areas to look closely at the whole domestic violence situation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I can assure you that we are playing catch-up when we are attempting to deal with this situation.

I was very pleased recently to open a new domestic violence shelter in Lockhart River, which cost the Government over \$800,000 to build. I was pleased to work closely with my colleagues the Minister for Families and the Minister for Housing to find funds to commence building a new domestic violence shelter at Palm Island and that, I understand, has begun construction. As well, I am negotiating with my colleagues to find funds in this year's budget to provide a new shelter at Napranum, where the need is great. The community currently operates a makeshift domestic violence shelter out of a tin shed with 10 steel cots. But there is catch-up.

As well, from the other half a million dollars allocated to the Office of Women's Policy last year, we were able to start funding a court assistance domestic violence project, something that is long overdue in this State. In other States they have been fully funded. We are piloting a number of court assistance projects around Queensland and, when we work out how those services are delivered and the best model, we will continue with that program.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I suppose as a supplementary to that question, would you be able to confirm whether that additional \$1m—you talked about an additional \$1m in your area of responsibility. But is there a balance of another \$1m to make up that \$2m extra as promised in the Family Services budget?

**Ms SPENCE:** You will have to ask the Minister for Families about the funding for domestic violence in her budget. I understand she will appear before the Estimates Committee this afternoon. I am sure she will be happy to answer those questions.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I believe that you should be able to know how much she is allocating in that because it was a key election promise in the area of domestic violence. Even though there may be split responsibilities, your policy area should still be reviewing what is being delivered in other areas. My next question is in relation to whether you have an eating disorder strategy and how much money you are contributing for this and where these funds are being spent.

**Ms SPENCE:** We certainly do have an eating disorder strategy. I am pleased to announce that I, with my colleague the Minister for Families, recently launched one of our Government's responses to that strategy. We have this year funded a Girl Genius Campaign. It has been funded by the Office of Women's Policy to the tune of \$80,000. The Department of Families, Youth and Community Care have contributed \$70,000. This is an exciting new project which targets young girls between the ages of 11 and 14. In the past many of our eating disorder projects have targeted teenage girls and, indeed, older women. But all of the advice we receive indicates that you really do have to get to girls much younger than the teenage years, and that is unfortunate.

The project that we have launched is a series of postcards and posters. They are designed to be used in schools and community groups. They are going to be distributed in the December and January editions of Girlfriend magazine, which I understand is the magazine that is most popularly read by girls of this particular age group. In planning the campaign, we took the posters and postcards to a number of focus groups and the girls were enthusiastic about the type of campaign and the messages that we were giving out in the Girl Genius Campaign.

As well, as part of the eating disorder project, we have allocated \$410,000 to focus on other strategies. \$200,000 of the funds were made available on a non-recurrent basis in an eating disorder grants program. The priorities of the program were a research component to identify gaps in the provision of services and to recommend future planning coordination, a young women's component and a component aimed at providing

information and education to health professionals. As well, we made funds available in the amount of \$208,000—I should clarify that. \$200,000 was for the first strategy. Another \$208,000 worth of grants was made to organisations such as the La Boite Theatre. We gave them \$20,000 for a regional tour of a production called *What Is the Matter with Mary Jane?* It is a wonderful one person play which deals with the whole subject of anorexia. It is travelling around schools. I had the opportunity of seeing the play. I think it is excellent. We have also allocated \$80,000 for a youth awareness campaign and \$108,000 to work with Education Queensland for professional development of teachers, school nurses and guidance officers.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I again refer you to the same Queensland Labor Party statement document wherein your party pledged to—

"... assist some child-care centres to host a regular, early morning GP service. This will give busy parents a one-stop clinic for children's immunisation, check-ups and attention to the frequent infections young children catch before their immunity builds up. The doctors working in the clinics will forward clinical information to the child's general practitioners to ensure continuity of care."

What have you done and what progress has been undertaken to implement this policy commitment?

**Ms SPENCE:** The responsibility for the implementation of that budgetary area lies with the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, who has the Office of Child Care within her portfolio. The Office of Women's Policy does not have any specific child-care budget. However, we are working with that department to implement the program that you were just mentioning.

On a personal level, I have had the delight to work with a private child-care agency at Sunnybank, which I believe was the first in the State to start, on its own initiative, an early morning GP clinic. They were fortunate in being able to do that, because one of the mothers in the child-care group was a GP who thought of the idea of starting the clinic. I understand it is operating very successfully. That has happened without the funding of Government, although we did assist that child-care agency in getting through the red tape in some of our legislation to make that occur. Although it can work successfully at a private child-care centre in a fairly affluent part of Queensland where parents want the service

and can afford to pay for the service, the challenge for us is to initiate that kind of GP early morning clinic in other child-care centres where funds may not be so easily available and where they do not have GPs knocking at the door wanting to run a clinic. I believe there is a future for child-care clinics. It is certainly a need that many mothers and parents generally express to me. People who in their busy lives do not have the time to include a visit to the doctor for their children find it a very useful service. We will continue supporting it.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I think there is a lot of merit in that particular proposal. The question is: when is that going to happen? It was a commitment of your party on coming to Government. What sort of monitoring role do you have in making sure that those key areas, which are very much related to the women's policy area, are actually implemented—even if they are sitting under another Minister's portfolio?

**Ms SPENCE:** As I explained before, the responsibility for the budget for that area and the initiative for that area falls within the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, which has the Office of Child Care within its agency. Of course, the Office of Women's Policy is very interested in the whole issue of child care. In so many other issues that concern Queensland women—whether it is women who catch public transport, women in sport or women in education—the role of the Office of Women's Policy's is to have input into the policy decisions of other Government agencies. It is a job that it does very well. That is a job that, as Minister, I have asked the Office of Women's Policy to refocus on under the Labor Government. I believe it is doing that. It is certainly working with the child-care agency to ensure that our commitments and our promises are met.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I again refer you to the Queensland Labor Party New Directions policy document where it is stated—

"A Labor Government will establish a child-care industry forum involving representatives of all stakeholders, including parents, unions, community child-care centres, private child-care centres, family day care services, outside school hours care services, early child-care experts and school principals. That ongoing forum will consider the issues affecting the delivery of child care in Queensland and advise the Minister of ways to improve the quality and availability of child care across the State."

As the Minister responsible for women's policy, what steps have you undertaken to establish the forum? What are the results of that ongoing forum on child-care delivery? What measures have you implemented to improve the quality and availability of child care across the State, as your policy stated it would do? This is still a sector that the women's policy area has to be strongly involved in monitoring and helping to implement.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think the honourable member is a bit slow to get the point that I have made in the previous two replies. I do not have a budget nor do I have the direct responsibility for delivering child care. That lies squarely with the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care, who has the child-care agency in her department. However, I understand that the child-care industry forum that you are alluding to has already been established. You may care to ask the Minister about the details of that. I will reiterate once again that the Office of Women's Policy looks at whole-of-Government women's issues. We are as concerned about child care as we are concerned about women's safety at railway stations, women's access to non-traditional work and women in education. We do not undertake responsibility for all those initiatives. We work with those departments to ensure that a woman's perspective is heard and understood by other Government agencies when framing their policies.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I have heard your answer. The question really is: what are you doing—

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the member to cease this line of questioning. The Minister is here to answer questions about her portfolio. The Minister has already objected on a number of occasions to questions outside her responsibility.

**Miss SIMPSON:** With respect, this is the Office of Women's Policy. These are issues that are relevant to women's policy. Unless you are wanting to censor this particular line of questioning—

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am not wanting to do that at all. In the same context—and I do not want to debate the matter here—

**Miss SIMPSON:** I will put it in these terms so you understand, Mr Chairman. Minister, you have a social and fiscal responsibility charter that talks about transparency and accountability in Government. You also have Labor Party policy that talks about issues that are clearly related to the women's policy area. My question is: what are the outputs of your

policy area if you are not involved in monitoring the delivery of child-care services, in particular this forum? In short terms, what are you doing in regard to these things?

**Ms SPENCE:** I would invite the honourable member to read through past Estimates committees debates on women's policy. I understand her frustration, because I sat there year after year during Estimates committees and attempted the same line of questioning to the Honourable Joan Sheldon when she was the Minister responsible for women's policies. I guess I tried to get answers out of her about the Department of Primary Industries' women's initiatives in family-friendly workplaces. I tried to get answers out of her about what the sport and recreation department was doing with respect to women. On each occasion, the Minister responsible for women's policy at the time would not answer questions that were not directly related to her budget. Although she professed to have a whole-of-Government understanding of what other agencies were doing, she would not answer questions that were not related directly to the women's policy statement and budget. Basically, I think it is unreasonable for the member to expect me to have a direct line to every single budget in every other department and know the intricacies of their policy and their budgets.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Are you driving women's policy in the State or are you relying on your colleagues to do that?

**Ms SPENCE:** I take it that that is the next question. Certainly, the Office of Women's Policy, as I have said a number of times today, has a whole-of-Government view. It certainly regards itself as the premier agency in Government to direct women's policy and suggest women's policies to other agencies. That is a role that it takes very seriously and, I believe, does very well. However, it is not directly responsible for budgets that lie in other portfolios. It has an interagency brief. That is something that it does very well.

One of the achievements in the last year has been the publishing of a social and economic profile of women in Queensland. That was a whole-of-Government look at the status of women in all areas of work and living. I invite the honourable member to get a copy of that and have a look at that. The other things that the office is involved in are the Task Force on Women and the Criminal Code, which we jointly sponsor with my colleague the Attorney-General. Each year we are launching the annual action plan for women. We launched the first on International Women's

Day this year. We will continue to launch that on International Women's Day. The annual action plan details what each Government agency is doing with respect to women's policy. It is meant to be, if you like, a report card on how the Labor Government is going about implementing and achieving positive policies for women and girls in Queensland. As well, this year we hosted a round table that was attended by representatives of 55 Queensland women's organisations Statewide.

In all areas of Government policy the Office of Women's Policy has a contribution to make. They regularly brief me on Cabinet submissions and give a women's perspective, and they informally and formally meet with officers of every agency of this Government to give a women's policy perspective.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I refer you to note 1 on page 2-14, in which you have claimed that the difference between budgeted and actual expenditure for the 1998-99 financial year was due to building and motor vehicle leasing costs, under "other expenses". How do you expect us to believe that the difference of \$2.034m between the budget and actual figures for supplies and services is due to costs being accounted under "other expenses", which has a total of only \$184,000.

**Ms SPENCE:** I will ask the Executive Director of the Office of Women's Policy, Stephanie Belfrage, to respond.

**Ms BELFRAGE:** I am happy to respond to that question. The difference between what is stated as the budget for the 1998-99 budget, \$4.638m, and what was actually taken in revenue, \$3.424m, can be explained by the note. There are two factors there. The exceeding of the budget does refer to building and motor vehicle leasing costs, which in the 1998-99 budget come in under "additional expenses". Additionally, in relation to new initiative funding which was originally budgeted as supplies and services in the 1998-99 budget, in the actual budget there is a special section for that. That explains the difference between the two figures.

In terms of the payments for outputs, which is the first line of revenues on that statement, there is a difference there of \$1.2m. That comes from a transfer of funds of approximately half a million dollars through a machinery of Government process directly to the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care for the Domestic Violence Fund. The remainder of that amount is for carryovers into the current financial year.

The second line, user charges, sets out that the amount of \$135,000 was budgeted and the amount of \$78,000 was actually received. That \$135,000 was for contributions from other Government departments to the establishment of the Women's Council for Rural and Regional Communities. \$78,000 of that money has been received. The remainder is still to come from the other Government departments.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Minister, given that you have failed to ensure that issues relating to women's policy which fall into other portfolios are being addressed, how can you claim, as your MPS does, to "ensure Government policies and services are responsive to the distinct and diverse needs of women and girls in Queensland"?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not know how the member can make the assertion that I have failed to ensure that women's policy in other Government departments is being addressed. I have spent most of the question time in this Estimates briefing trying to explain to the member that the first role of the Office of Women's Policy is to work with other Government departments to ensure that issues and policies that affect women and girls in Queensland are considered by other Government departments. We do that in a number of forums in a number of ways.

As I mentioned, one of the things the Women's Policy Unit does each Monday is brief me on budget submissions, as they brief other Government departments when they are formulating budget submissions. This has become central to the Office of Women's Policy under this Government, unlike the former Women's Policy Unit under the coalition Government, which forgot the whole policy issue and got out there and promoted itself and promoted the Government in a shameless way. This policy unit is focusing on Government. We are about highlighting Government's policy priorities for women and ensuring that other Government departments meet those policy priorities.

If the member would care to have a look at the Annual Action Plan for Women, which we launched for the first time this year and which we will continue producing each March, the member would gain some understanding of the role that the Office of Women's Policy has in promoting successful policies for women and girls under this Government.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Minister, of the 748 nominations for significant appointments provided by the Office of Women's Policy, how

many nominees were successful in their appointments, who were these nominees and to which positions were they appointed? If you want to table that information—

**Ms SPENCE:** We do not have specific numbers. You are asking me basically how many women have been appointed to Government boards in the last year, who those women are and which boards. No, we do not have that sort of information available. What I can tell you is that the Office of Women's Policy has been very active in promoting the register. We have achieved an increase in the percentage of women on Government boards in this State. I have to say: it is not progressing as quickly as I would have hoped, but we have, I understand, improved the percentage from 23% under the coalition Government to 25%. We have seen an increase in the number of women appointed to Government boards and statutory authorities. The Women's Register is integral in ensuring that that occurs.

If you compare the achievements of this Government with those of the former Government in appointing women to major positions, we score very well. Unlike any other Estimates Committee I suggest, certainly under the former Government, you have before you today senior executives of my department who happen to all be women. It is a proud achievement under this Labor Government that we have three directors-general who are women; shamefully, under the coalition Government, there were none.

We have targets to get women on boards. We have targets to increase the number of women in the senior executive service of this Public Service, and we will do so. We have targets to ensure that women and girls get their part in job opportunities in Queensland. We have a very proud record so far in ensuring that women get opportunities at the traineeships that the Government is offering.

Unfortunately, we are not being quite so successful in enlisting women and girls as apprentices as I would have hoped. This is a difficult area, but we have targeted that particular area for specific attention. The Premier's Council for Women, established under this Government, has as its first task to look at women's employment opportunities and women in the workplace. I have asked them specifically to focus on the area of women and non-traditional work.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I call the member for Mundingburra.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 2-12 of the MPS refers to the Office of Women's Policy holding a series of community outreach forums for women across Queensland. Can you outline the aims and objectives of such forums?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. I think one of the hallmarks of the Beattie Labor Government has been this Government's desire and indeed capacity to get out there and talk to ordinary Queenslanders. We have instituted Community Cabinets. We have 13 a year throughout the State. We have instituted regional forums, which occur four times a year. All of these are very successful and have been received very positively by Queenslanders generally. I have asked the Office of Women's Policy to start a process of community forums—community outreach forums—because never in the past has the Women's Policy Office gone out there and talked to ordinary women in Queensland the way the Government generally has in the past year.

The Office of Women's Policy is very successful, through Women's Infolink, at getting information out to many Queensland women, and I am happy to talk about that later in terms of statistics. However, they have not done the face-to-face meetings that might be expected of them. This month—in fact, next week—we will be holding our first community outreach forum in Logan City. We are doing that in conjunction with the Logan City Council and many women's organisations in Logan City. I understand the response is very positive, and we are looking to have a big crowd there in Logan next week. I understand that many of the honourable members have been invited to come along.

This is really about the Office of Women's Policy and giving me, as the Women's Policy Minister, the opportunity to sit down with women throughout Queensland and listen to the issues that concern them. It will also give us the opportunity to explain Government policy to them and also explain the range of services available to them from Government; because I am concerned that, while we, as a Government, provide a lot of services, it is very difficult for women to gain an understanding of what might be available to them. That is the purpose of these outreach forums. I expect that this one will be very successful next week and that the Office of Women's Policy will, on a regular basis, conduct these outreach forums throughout the State.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** With regard to the Women's Infolink, which you were speaking

about before, can you inform the Committee if there has been a significant increase in the number of women contacting Women's Infolink offices around the State?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Office of Women's Policy has Women's Infolinks in Brisbane, on the Sunshine Coast and in Townsville. The number of women making contact with Women's Infolink has increased by nearly 45% in the last financial year. The numbers rose from 19,838 in 1998 to 25,674 in 1999, demonstrating, I believe, a demand for the services provided.

Contacts to that Women's Infolink are primarily from women seeking crisis information about things like legal issues, health services, employment and violence-related matters. Rural women are also high users of this service. The number of women who sought information like info sheets and other resources has almost tripled in the last financial year, and the number of women who are accessing the computers provided by Infolink for job seeking and research purposes more than doubled in the last financial year from over 1,000 in 1998 to 2,500 in 1999. The number of women who were trained and who are using the Internet services provided in that office also doubled from 300 in 1998 to 600 in 1999.

Women's Infolink does not just respond, though, to phone calls, nor does it just send out info sheets to women who seek assistance. They also operate and maintain a web site called Bush Talk, which is specifically designed for rural women and is very popular with rural women. They also produce a newspaper called QW, which is produced four times a year and is sent out to 8,000 organisations and individuals throughout Queensland.

Women's Infolink is also very involved in organising activities for International Women's Day. But I guess that the greatest strength of Women's Infolink is its ability to respond to Queensland women in crisis. Women who pick up the phone and make that free call to Women's Infolink throughout the State immediately get a listening ear from our trained people at the other end. They immediately receive information that will direct them to services that they need in times of crisis. I had the opportunity recently, when visiting western Queensland, to look at the videoconferencing facilities out there, and I am suggesting that, in the next year, we actually expand those services in Women's Infolink so that women in rural and regional Queensland can talk face-to-face to our officers.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** With reference on page 2-11 to the Premier's Council for Women, which is a State peak body representing the interests of Queensland women, what work has the council undertaken since its inception?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am pleased that you have given me the opportunity to expand on the work of the Premier's Council for Women. As I said previously, it was established under this Government. It is a group of 12 women who come from all parts of the State, all different types of backgrounds and occupations. It is the first time that a council has had direct access to a Minister for Women's Policy, and I meet with this council regularly. They also have direct access to the Premier, and the Premier has met with the council and will meet with the chair of the council on a regular basis.

The Premier and I have asked the Premier's council to undertake, as its first task, a comprehensive report on women and work-related issues. To date, the council has conducted research and identified key issues and current strategies on women and work, including work force participation, the casualisation of labour, family-friendly work practices, non-traditional training and employment, pay equity and workplace culture. I think we would all agree that these issues need ongoing attention from Government, because when we let the focus drop from these particular issues we find workplace practices that are discriminating against women—and there have been some very high-profile cases of that revealed recently by both Commonwealth and State Anti-Discrimination Commissions.

The council has developed an information brochure for wide distribution to the community, describing its role and current work, as well as providing details about council members. They are developing a work web page as a resource for women on a wide range of work issues, and that will be launched in November.

It is important, I think, for Premier's councils or any kind of consultative councils such as this to have a high profile and let women in their communities know who the membership of this council is. It is only by them truly representing the women in their communities that they will bring those issues to the attention of their own members of the council and, indeed, to the attention of the Government.

I am very impressed by the work of the women—the individual women—on that

Premier's council, who have endeavoured to go back to their local communities and make contact with women's organisations and achieve a high profile for themselves and this council. I am looking forward to a lot of positive work from the council in the years ahead.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, page 2-11 of the MPS refers to the Women and Reconciliation Strategy. Can the Minister outline the aim of the strategy and what work was undertaken in this program in 1998-99?

**Ms SPENCE:** This is a new initiative of the Labor Government. When I became Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Women's Policy, one of the first policy decisions I made was to institute this Women and Reconciliation Strategy. I had served on the State Reconciliation Council—a Federally funded body—for a number of years, and I had witnessed first-hand the lack of attention that council received—and the whole issue of reconciliation received—and it seems to me that while many local councils throughout the State have really embraced reconciliation in an attempt to undertake activities in their own local areas, the State Government had played a very little role in promoting reconciliation.

One of the practical things that we did was put an officer on this strategy, a woman by the name of Isobel Tarago. She has spent the last year going throughout Queensland establishing focus groups, encouraging women to share their stories, and developing an understanding of important issues, such as heritage and native title issues. The stories that she has collected are being collated now and will be published in a book next year as part of this strategy.

As well, the officer has successfully supported and promoted a number of reconciliation events throughout Queensland. We held two reconciliation events in Brisbane in March last year, but we have held a number of reconciliation events throughout regional and rural Queensland. I was privileged to be at a reconciliation event earlier this year that was held by the Burketown Shire Council. I understand it was the first time a reconciliation event had ever been held in that part of the world. It is because of the work of this officer and our department that the shire council was given the support that it needed to hold a reconciliation event. This has been happening throughout Queensland. I think that we, as a Government, have a role to play in reconciliation. It is part of the focus of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development; it is part of the focus of the Office of Women's Policy; and

we certainly have it as a focus as a Labor Government.

**Mr FENLON:** Page 2-11 of the MPS states that the department administered a \$1m domestic violence fund for innovative programs to assist women victims in indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Can you explain how this \$1m was allocated?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am happy to expand on the exact allocation of that \$1m which I touched on briefly as a result of a question from the Opposition. The funds were distributed as follows: \$490,000 was spent by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy for new prevention initiatives in indigenous communities; \$460,000 was spent in conjunction with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, comprising \$310,000 for court support services, \$15,000 for the development of court support standards and protocols, \$25,000 for resources and training for the implementation of court support standards and protocols, \$60,000 for a review of responses to domestic violence in Queensland, and \$50,000 for an evaluation of the Women's Coordinated Community Response; and \$50,000 was also spent by the Office of Women's Policy on the production of a domestic violence educational video as a resource for young people.

These allocations have contributed, we believe, to the establishment of a recurrently funded court support services network for Queensland, led to a number of innovative programs in indigenous communities and strengthened the resources infrastructure and evaluation of service models. The allocation of \$1m under the program this year will be developed cooperatively with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Page 2-12 refers to a joint strategy on women as consumers with the Office of Fair Trading and the New South Wales Department of Women. Can you explain what this joint strategy is?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. The Women as Consumers project is a project that I developed on becoming Minister. It seemed to me that we have had reports in the past which clearly quantify and anecdotally talk about the experiences of women as consumers in a number of areas—particularly in the finance area, the real estate area, the motor trades area and in the services area. We have

recently had some publicity about women and haircuts.

We have undertaken a project of working with the motor traders industry to help that industry in its dealings with women as customers. The industry is pleased to come on board and work with Government in this area because it sees it as a positive for the industry. The industry knows that it needs to improve its services to women because this will support the industry and allow it to sell more cars and fix more cars for women, I guess.

We have established a focus group made up of the Motor Traders Association, the RACQ, Queensland Transport, consumer groups and women's organisations who are assisting us with this project. At the recent Ministerial Councils for Women's Affairs and for Consumer Affairs I was able to enlist the support of my colleagues in other States who were excited about the direction in which we are moving with this project in Queensland. These Ministers have decided that they want to be part of this project. It will become a national project. In the next year we will be further developing the project with other States.

We believe that the results of the project will not only help that industry deal with women as customers, but will perhaps help other disadvantaged people. It may assist in how industries deal with people who are disabled or who come from non-English speaking backgrounds. I expect that once this project is completed and we judge the success of the program we will move on and work with another industry in the same way in order to help it improve its service delivery to women as customers.

**Mr MUSGROVE:** I want to turn to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy. Page 1-9 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that a high priority is being given to the completion of a strategic mapping project which will highlight program and expenditure overlaps between Queensland Government agencies. Clearly, this will have an impact on the whole-of-Government coordination role with which your department has been charged as far as indigenous matters are concerned. How far has this project progressed and what does it mean to the people of Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** The reason for establishing a separate department for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development in the first place was so that we could establish an agency which clearly had a lead agency

role over indigenous affairs in this State. Although when this office was attached to the Families portfolio it was intended that it would have a lead agency role, it was always suggested to me that it was difficult to have that kind of lead agency role when it was attached to another Government department with a greater budget and perhaps different kinds of responsibilities. Indigenous people in Queensland have always believed that they did not necessarily want their agency attached to a welfare portfolio, which is what Families is primarily all about, I guess. We established a new department with a lead agency whole-of-Government role.

The other issue which I think has been a cause of concern for many years—not only for indigenous people but for committees of this Parliament, such as the Public Works Committee and the Public Accounts Committee—is that there has never been any significant whole-of-Government coordination about how we spend Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dollars in this State. As the Committee is aware, there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander units in many Government departments: for example, in Education and others. What we have found is that those units go out and do their own thing and spend their own dollars without a great understanding of what is happening in other Government agencies.

Indigenous people have complained to me that what they get all the time from Governments is people going out consulting, consulting, consulting, reinventing the wheel and spending money on programs that have already been tried and failed. There has not been a body of knowledge or understanding of what is going on from a whole-of-Government perspective.

One of the first duties of the new department has been to undertake a strategic mapping project, which basically means that the department is taking a stocktake of Government spending on indigenous Queensland in every Government agency. The department is now getting a clear picture of what is being spent and where it is being spent. Once we have that picture it will be produced and will be readily available. We will then be able to take on that lead agency role and make suggestions and negotiate with other agencies about how they prioritise their spending and how they might measure the success of their programs. The information will be used to compile a 10-year plan for spending on indigenous Queenslanders which

the Government hopes to unveil in the first half of next year.

**Mr MUSGROVE:** Thank you, Minister. That is certainly most encouraging. At 1-12 of the MPS you commit some \$12m over four years to new stores in the Torres Strait. Can you explain how this decision will benefit those communities?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is one of my proudest achievements that in this year's Budget I managed to convince my colleagues that this expenditure was necessary. For a long time we have heard from the Torres Strait communities that the old stores on their islands are run down. They have very poor food storage facilities. These are stores which would be regarded as intolerable in any other community in Queensland. In most respects, these stores could be judged as a health and safety risk. I understand that workplace health and safety officers have for a long period of time expressed concern about the state of these stores.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy engaged consulting engineers to look at these stores. As a result of that report, the suggestion was that it would not be feasible to merely upgrade the stores and that they all needed replacing. I have recently had the opportunity to visit the Torres Strait, and particularly the outer islands of the Torres Strait. I have looked at these stores first-hand and I can tell you that they have needed replacing for a long time. Thus we have committed \$12m over four years to replacing these stores. We will be working with the Island Coordinating Council in delivering that particular project. IBIS, who manages the stores in the Torres Strait, has informed me that they plan to furnish the new stores with modern refrigeration. That will mean that the Torres Strait Islander people will have better access to fruit and vegetables and give them a greater choice and enable them to retain those fruit and vegetables for a longer period. I guess, given the appalling health statistics, particularly in the Torres Strait with diet-related diseases such as diabetes, it is beholden on the Government to ensure that people in that part of the world have access to fresh fruit and vegetables if we are going to improve those sorts of health statistics in the future. I think that the \$12m is really part of that whole health strategy.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. If I can now turn to issues of ATSI governance. On page 1-17 of the MPS, you indicate that you are spending \$5.8m this year to replace four Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

council chambers. I note that these include Mapoon, which currently does not even have a council. Why is there the need for new facilities for these indigenous councils?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. While the Torres Strait Islander people have been lobbying successive Governments over a number of years for new stores, there have been a number of Aboriginal councils in Queensland which have been lobbying for new council chambers for a number of years. The funding that has been allocated to replace chambers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils will go to Bamaga, Lockhart River, Woorabinda and Mapoon. I have looked at each of these buildings and they are in urgent need of replacement. Given that Aboriginal councils have responsibilities that are not demanded of non-indigenous councils in this State, and given that Governments are expecting, quite rightly, increased levels of accountability and efficiency from those councils, it is unreasonable for us to expect that they are going to be able to deliver those standards of efficiencies in the kind of dilapidated premises that they currently operate out of.

In the case of Mapoon, you are quite right; there is no council at present. However, I am very optimistic that we will get the Community Services Act amendments, which are currently before the Parliament, passed in the next session of Parliament to allow the people of Mapoon for the first time to vote for their own council in the elections of March 2000. This is something that they have been lobbying for for a number of years. Obviously, the people of Mapoon—they currently operate out of a donga—will need some sort of council chambers to start themselves off as a professional and fully fledged council for the first time in March next year. So we are working very closely with that community to ensure that we deliver the kind of council chambers that they require.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The hearing of Estimates Committee G is now suspended for a luncheon break. Hearing will resume at 2 p.m. with the Committee's consideration of the proposed expenditure for the Office of Fair Trading.

Sitting suspended from 12.59 p.m. to 2 p.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearings of Estimates Committee G are now resumed. Does the Minister want to make a brief opening statement in relation to this?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, Mr Chairman. I would like to begin by introducing the additional departmental officers who have joined me this afternoon. You have already been introduced to the departmental officers on my left. On my right I would like to introduce you to the Registrar of the Queensland Building Tribunal, Mr Theo Haralampou; the General Manager of the Residential Tenancies Authority, Carolyn Mason; the General Manager of the Building Services Authority, Matt Miller; and the Acting Commissioner for Consumer Affairs, Ulla Zeller.

This afternoon we are discussing the Estimates of the Department of Equity and Fair Trading with a \$49.4m budget. My portfolio responsibilities include the two statutory authorities, the Residential Tenancies Authority and the Building Services Authority. Their work contributes to achieving a better quality of life for Queenslanders through improving standards, equity, practices and confidence in the building industry and the residential rental market. As part of my reform program for the building industry, the Department of Equity and Fair Trading now administers funding for the Queensland Building Tribunal, which provides fair and affordable mediation of unresolved disputes between home owners and builders.

My agency's budgets have been recast to deliver on the Government's commitments and to redress the past shortfalls in coalition funding for key programs. The 1999-2000 State Budget is the first one based on accrual outputs. This new framework replaces the cash based input focused budgeting system with a more open and accountable format which the Government introduced to better inform the Queensland public of the true costs of Government services, including depreciation expenses and accruing employee entitlements. As part of the recent accruals conversion process, some variations will occur between the 1998-99 actual unaudited financial statements shown in the MPS and the audited financial statement in the department's annual reports. This is due to the inclusion in the MPS financials of controlled and administered transactions, carryovers of output payments and equity injections and withdrawals.

Our achievement in such a short time during this transitional year demonstrates clearly the commitment, dedication, capacity and enthusiasm of the staff in my portfolio. In 1999-2000, the total costs of the budget for the Office of Fair Trading is \$45m, for which the Government contributes \$13m in control funds and \$12m in administered funds. The

remaining funds are obtained through user charges estimated at \$6m, other revenue principally from the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund at an estimated \$13m, and a small equity injection.

The Office of Fair Trading works towards achieving a better quality of life and safer and more supportive communities for Queensland consumers and business traders through promoting integrity in the marketplace based on the principles of fair trading, appropriate conduct and consumer protection. Strategic priorities include improving regional and information services and achieving an equitable, competitive, informed and safe marketplace.

Through the current legislative reform program and systems realignment, I will continue to ensure that the services provided by my portfolio respond to the community's changing needs and the Beattie Labor Government's commitment to achieving responsible economic management and accountability, innovation, community capacity building, sustainability and more jobs for Queenslanders.

I also to take this opportunity to thank staff of the Office of Fair Trading, the Residential Tenancies Authority, the Queensland Building Tribunal and the Queensland Building Services Authority for their proficiency in implementing Government priorities during our first year in office. I now welcome questions.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. I call on the member for Noosa, Bruce Davidson.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I refer you to the Responsive Management—Effective Teamwork Building workshop held over the weekend of April 12 and 13 by the Office of Fair Trading at the Outlook, Boonah. Can you confirm that a disagreement broke out amongst those in attendance, which also saw a fellow attendee thrown from a balcony, tearing his shirt? Is it your idea of team building to have people thrown from balconies? Did the cost of some \$5,345 include the cost of replacing the unfortunate gentleman's shirt? Was the cost of beverages paid for by the department throughout the duration of the weekend?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have to say that I am surprised at the shallowness of the shadow Minister's first question. We have a budget of over \$40m and he is focusing on one weekend training conference. In terms of training, I have the figures available for all of

my department. In the last financial year, the Department of Equity and Fair Trading spent \$87,196 on training generally throughout the department. This represents 0.57%, which is less than 1% of total employee expenses.

If the question is aimed at our departmental training budgets, I am happy to answer that. I suspect that a criticism might be that we are not spending enough money on training, rather than too much. I understand the member's colleagues in the Federal Government recently suggested that all companies and Governments should levy 2% for training on all employee areas. Unfortunately, my department has not even met 2%, not only in DEFT but also in DATSIPD, which only spent 0.4%. The RTA spent 0.52% and the BSA spent 0.42% of their total employee expenses on training. I do not know the relevance of the rest of the member's question.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I will ask again: did you or your director-general receive a briefing on the fracas that broke out at Boonah? Did the cost of some \$5,345 include the cost of replacing the unfortunate gentleman's shirt? Was the cost of beverages paid for by the department throughout the duration of that weekend?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have not received a briefing on that particular conference. You would all be aware, through the answers that we have provided to questions on notice, that there are a number of training conferences that our departmental employees went to over the last year. I certainly do not get a briefing on each of those conferences or training activities. However, I am happy to ask my director-general to comment further on the particular training exercise to which the honourable member refers.

**Ms O'DONNELL:** The particular training exercise was for investigation staff of the Office of Fair Trading. As you say, the cost was around \$5,300, which worked out at about \$200 per staff member over a two day period. I think in any estimate, that is a fairly cheap cost for staff members. I did receive a report following the article in the paper about a fracas at that training venue. My understanding is that someone was pushed. I have had no report that someone was pushed off a balcony. There has been no claim for any damages by any staff member. My understanding is that the beverages were paid for by the staff.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Did you receive a

complaint from the Outlook at Boonah about the behaviour of your staff for that weekend?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will refer that question to the director-general.

**Ms O'DONNELL:** No, I did not.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** As the Minister responsible for the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, I refer you to last year's Estimates Committee where I asked about a Labor Party policy commitment to open new Consumer Affairs offices in the places of rapid growth in regional areas. I refer specifically to page 65 of the Estimates transcripts, where you responded in part by saying, "I hope to come back to you in next year's budget process and announce where the new offices will be located in Queensland." Have you undertaken and conducted a needs analysis? If so, when was it completed? Where is the funding in the Budget papers to establish those offices?

**Ms SPENCE:** In the last year we have not established any new offices. However, I am pleased to say that we have expanded the services at some of our regional offices, namely, Toowoomba, Maryborough and Mackay. They have all had additional staff allocated to them. This year's budget provides for an additional five investigators to go to the Gold Coast office.

In terms of opening new regional offices—we are certainly examining the feasibility and, indeed, the need for that. We are actually looking at co-locating Fair Trading offices with other Government departments in some regions in Queensland. That is an ongoing activity.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** As you will recall, Minister, at the last sitting of Parliament I asked you a question on the current turnaround time required to register a business name. On 21 September, my electorate office applied by sending the appropriate forms and a cheque for \$93 to your department to register a business name. Whilst the cheque has been presented, to date—some 23 days later—there has been no more contact from your department and no notification of the business name having been registered. As a result of the commitment you gave in the House about your department's ability to fix this delay problem, when can business in this State expect you and your Government to lift your performance to facilitate business activities in Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will have to ask the Acting Commissioner for Consumer Affairs to answer the specifics of your question. However, as I said in the Parliament, the change to the new

computer system to register business names was unavoidable. Last year, the Australian Securities and Investments Commission gave advice that Queensland should look towards an alternative computer system for business names by the end of June 1999. In response, the department requested CITEC to develop a new system. Queensland Treasury approved funding for the project of \$1.7m.

BACHCO, the system to replace the old ASCOT system, was planned to commence operations on 26 August 1999. The date conversion from ASCOT to BACHCO commenced on the evening of Friday, 20 August and was largely completed on Wednesday, 25 August. It was always planned that document processing would cease for three working days prior to the commencement. This fact alone was predicated to cause arrears of work. CITEC encountered conversion difficulties and, unfortunately, the system was not available for commencement on 26 August as planned. However, BACHCO became fully operational on Monday, 30 August, despite the fact that there were a number of problems encountered with the system and some interruptions. Even with the best planning, there will always be occasional computer errors and action has been taken to reduce the critical arrears.

I will take the specifics of the honourable member's question on notice and get back to him later today. I do not have a brief in front of me on the particular circumstances of him wanting to register his electorate office as a business, but we will get back to him on that.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I did not want to register my electorate office as a business. I submitted a business registration application. In the Parliament you apologised to businesses in Queensland for the delays. At that time the delay was four weeks. It has now been 23 days. The application has not been processed. We have had no notification from your department. How long does it now take for a business to register its name through your department in Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am surprised that the application to which the honourable member refers has taken so long. I have not received complaints of that nature. I talk to the business community frequently. We are happy to look into that application and get back to you with a more detailed response. I will ask the Acting Commissioner for Consumer Affairs to comment on how long it is currently taking to register business names.

**Ms ZELLER:** The most recent feedback that I have had is that the registration of business names has been proceeding fairly normally. Certainly, with the new BACHCO application, as could be expected, there were some teething problems. CITEC has been addressing those as they have arisen. We have been receiving very positive reports about the registration function. It comes as a surprise to me that there is an application outstanding for that period. I will be looking to receive a briefing on that.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** The application was lodged under Noosa Research. I talk to businesses on a regular basis, too, Minister, as you would appreciate. I am still receiving complaints that there are delays in registering business names. You said in the Parliament that four weeks was unacceptable. This one is approaching four weeks. How long does it now take for a business in Queensland to have its name registered through your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** I acknowledge that there were some problems when we changed the computer system for business names. As I have just detailed, they were unavoidable in many respects. It was a huge project to change from one system to another. Obviously, we are concerned that the business names register operates efficiently. As I said, I am unaware of the particular circumstances of this case and we will get back to you before the end of the day.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Through you, Minister, if I may, to Mrs Zeller, what is the current waiting time for a business to register its name through the department? Is it seven days, 14 days or 30 days? Our application is approaching four weeks and we still have not had confirmation that that name is registered. What is causing the delay?

**Ms ZELLER:** The advice that I have received is that we have returned to a normal period for the registration of a business name, which means that in most instances it can be done on the spot. For business name applications that have been lodged in our regional offices we have a process in place whereby the application gets faxed to the Brisbane office and the search function and the attendant functions are done on the spot. Basically, the applicant for the business name can wait in the regional office while a business name is registered. Was the application lodged in a regional office?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** No, it was sent through the post. We rang the department and requested an application. We received that

within two days. We sent that back with a cheque, which has been banked. As I said, it is now approaching four weeks and we have received no confirmation from the department.

**Ms ZELLER:** I hope we do not have a problem with Australia Post in this instance.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I have had a number of other complaints from other businesspeople.

**Ms ZELLER:** Certainly, it is a matter that I view with grave concern, because it is contrary to the feedback that I have been getting about the turnaround time for registration of business names.

**Ms SPENCE:** I wish to draw the attention of the honourable member to the table headed "Output Statement" on page 2-9 of the MPS. It is stated in respect of licensing and registrations that applications are normally processed within an average of 15 days. That is the answer to your question.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I note you just stated that there was funding of some \$1.7m for the BACHCO project. What was the actual cost of BACHCO from CITEC? Was BACHCO an off-the-shelf software application or did CITEC engage programmers to develop it?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will have to seek some advice on the details of that question. I will ask the acting commissioner to answer this question.

**Ms ZELLER:** The cost of the system is \$1.7m, or it is currently still under development for that figure. The approximate breakup of that figure is \$1.1m for the development of the software application. You asked whether it was an off-the-shelf application. No, it was not. New ground has been broken in the development of this replacement application. The balance of the \$1.7m is related to hardware costs.

As I mentioned previously, after receiving notice from the then ASC that we had to get off its ASCOT system by mid this year, over the past 12 months we have had to go through the whole tendering process, which we have done, and CITEC was the successful tenderer there. The whole development phase of this application has occurred over this period. Although it is not cutting into new ground with the technology involved, it is quite a unique software application in so far as it is dealing with so much data and in a range of categories of data that is pretty well unprecedented in Australia, to my understanding, with such a software application. This, of course, has also been a contributing factor to certain teething problems, and we are very pleased that these

have been resolved by CITEC as quickly as they have been.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Given that this issue has been going on for some months, what guarantees did you have from CITEC or the program developers that this system would suit your requirements? There have been problems with this system for the past three or four months. Why can this not be resolved?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that through the formal tendering process CITEC gave us those undertakings and there is a three-month warranty on the program. I think you are overstating the problems that are concerned with the transition, although we do acknowledge that it did not happen as smoothly as we would have liked. But I certainly have not had complaints from business about the delays to which you allude. This system has been so successful that Queensland's application will be used by four other jurisdictions as well as six other information brokers. Basically, Queensland is leading the way nationally in business names registration.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I will ask you again: what guarantees did you get from CITEC or the developers of the programs? Were any penalties associated with the letting of that tender?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will ask the acting commissioner to respond to that.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Were any penalties associated with the letting of this tender based on non-performance of the program?

**Ms ZELLER:** The penalties or redress are provided for in the contract that has been entered into by the department on behalf of the State Government and CITEC. The contract has been based upon the specifications that were tailor-made for the system in consultation with our agency. The relief available is provided for under the contract itself.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Were any penalties included in the letting of the tender for this contract?

**Ms ZELLER:** When you say "penalties"?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** For non-performance?

**Ms ZELLER:** There is a requirement that they deliver an application that complies with the specifications. We are logging problems as they occur with the system and they are basically remedying those problems as they are logged and as they occur. To the extent necessary, that is, I suppose, a penalty. As you would find ordinarily with commercial

partners under a contract, these difficulties are being worked through in a productive way.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** You say that you had a three-month guarantee on this system. When was it delivered to the department and is the guarantee still current? Will it continue to be current with the non-performance of the system?

**Ms ZELLER:** The guarantee continues through to the end of October. Hence the importance of any problems being effectively logged. In respect of those problems that are not corrected during the three-month period, we would still have the benefit of the three-month warranty applying to have those corrected. I should also mention that the introduction of the BACHCO system is a two-stage one, with the second stage relating to incorporated associations, cooperatives and charities. That is due to come on line in late November/early December. Similarly, there will be a three-month warranty attaching to that phase of the introduction. We certainly have this ongoing relationship where we would be looking at having problems corrected.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I should imagine they will have their fingers crossed. In your response to our first question on notice about consultants and their use by your department, no mention is made of a project and report you presented in the House undertaken and produced by Phil Dickie on behalf of your Department of Fair Trading. The project and subsequent report referred to the matter of marketeer operations on the Gold Coast. Why is there no indication in the answer given of this consultancy, how much was Mr Dickie paid for this endeavour and report, and why was such a report necessary when your Southport office investigators had all of their investigations on these matters complete and reports prepared prior to the commencement of Mr Dickie's project?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the reason that Mr Dickie's work for the department was not listed as a consultancy was that he was put on as a contract employee of the department for his time with the department. I reject the statement that the Southport Office of Fair Trading had all these issues covered. There was certainly no report to me or to the department about the activities of the two tier property marketing system that operates in Queensland until I drew the department's attention to the problems that this was creating.

That is not to say that the Southport officers of Fair Trading were unaware of the

problem, were not concerned about the problem or had not done some investigations of the problem. However, they, like most officers of Fair Trading around the State, are overworked. Particularly on the Gold Coast there has been a need for more investigators for some time. The number and the volume of complaints and the seriousness with which these complaints needed to be investigated meant that many of them simply had not received attention. That is why we have allocated in this year's budget funds to appoint five new officers to the Southport office. Indeed, that is why we put on Mr Phil Dickie to prepare an investigative report on the activities of the two tier property marketing system on the Gold Coast.

**Mr FENLON:** I note from the MPS on page 2-7 that considerable funds have been allocated to the establishment of an investigative squad to detect the practice of two tiered marketing in Queensland. Could the Minister please advise the Committee of the steps your department is taking to crack down on these unscrupulous operators who are threatening to sully the reputation of the State's property industry?

**Ms SPENCE:** Total funding of almost \$500,000 has been approved for this 12-month project. The Premier announced the project in Parliament. It is the creation of a special task force of investigators who will look at the complaints that the department has received about the activities of the two tier property marketers. As we have already mentioned, I have taken a lot of time this year and certainly a lot of the department's time to investigate the activities of these unscrupulous operators. Not only have we had the report that was prepared by the investigator Phil Dickie, we have also had a report that was prepared by a working party that I convened—a working party made up of members of the industry as well as consumer representatives—who have recommended to me legislative changes that are needed to stop the activities of the two tier property marketers. As well, we undertook to engage the services of Mr Bill Duncan, who is a professor at Queensland University of Technology and is one of the leading real estate experts in this State, indeed, in this nation. He has also delivered us a report of the legislative changes that are needed in this State.

As well, I am preparing the changes to the Auctioneers and Agents Act. The department is working very hard on that. The first stage has gone through Cabinet. I expect

to deliver that Act to Parliament early in the new year after we have gone through a proper consultation period with industry and with consumers. I believe that there are a number of measures we can take to deal with unscrupulous marketers and developers. These will form part of the legislative changes that we bring to Parliament next year.

**Mr FENLON:** I note from the MPS on page 2-8 that you plan to review the Mobile Homes Act. More and more people are opting for this style of accommodation, particularly here in Queensland. Could the Minister please advise the Committee what action you are taking to inform mobile park residents of their rights?

**Ms SPENCE:** There have been increasing calls on Government to review the Mobile Homes Act of 1989. At present 10,000 Queenslanders live in mobile home parks. They reside in 160 parks throughout the State and there have been a number of concerns about rising rents. Residents have been forced to abandon their homes without recouping anything near the purchase price. There are problems about the definition of "mobile homes" and the legislative protection that is afforded these residents. There are problems concerning the rights and obligations of park owners. We have concerns about harsh and unconscionable purchase agreements. We have concerns about overcharging or inadequate supply of water and electricity, deteriorating facilities in parks and a lack of consultation on park rule changes.

I also find in going out and talking to mobile home residents that there are difficulties for them in understanding their rights and responsibilities under the Act. That is why the department has been working with the Caxton Legal Centre and has recently launched a booklet called *Going Mobile: a Guide to Mobile Home Living*, which is a very clear and forthright explanation of not only the rights and obligations of residents in parks but also owners of parks. A lot of the difficulties can be overcome by this sort of clear explanation. We are looking at producing a video as well to give to mobile home residents to help them understand these rights and obligations. But in the meantime we are reviewing the Act and I hope to make the necessary legislative changes to the Act to be introduced to Parliament in the next year.

**Mr FENLON:** Could the Minister please advise the Committee what steps she is taking to strengthen the financial position of the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund as referred to on page 2-4 of the MPS?

**Ms SPENCE:** An audit of the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund was authorised by the director-general on 9 June to meet departmental accountability requirements. After a select tender process, in accordance with the State Purchasing Policy requirements, a group of accountants or auditors were appointed to conduct the internal audit. The cost was approximately \$12,500.

There has been a deterioration in the fund over the last nine years or so—ever since the Government started withdrawing \$9.8m from the fund each year to give as a grant to the Department of Housing. This is something that has occurred not only under Labor Governments but also under coalition Governments. Obviously you cannot keep withdrawing \$9.8m from a fund in a time of low interest rates without having some destabilising effect on the fund.

As a result of the audit report, we are having ongoing discussions with Treasury to look at the future of the fund. I have to say that the Department of Fair Trading does not make the decision to withdraw the \$9.8m to give to Housing each year; that is a decision that is made ultimately by Government and Treasury. Nor do we administer the fund; that is administered by Treasury. What we do receive is an allocation from the fund each year. That allocation goes to pay the claimants who are successful in making claims on the fund. It also funds the Auctioneers and Agents Committee and it also funds a certain number of our departmental staff who work as a secretariat of the committee and who are investigators primarily to investigate activities under the Auctioneers and Agents Act.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you be able to advise the Committee of the success or otherwise of claims against the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund, bearing in mind that this fund exists for the purposes of helping consumers in Queensland seek financial redress?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. During 1998-99 there were 358 claims made on the fund, to a total value of \$1,329,207. This compares with 307 claims made in the previous year, 1997-98. The claims in that year totalled \$959,511. While there were 100 claims against motor dealers for \$279,280, real estates represented the major source of claims, with 229 claims for a total of \$765,727. In this last year the collapse of three real estate agency businesses contributed to the significant variation in the value of the real estate related claims. As well, there were five receivers

appointed during 1998-99, compared with one in the previous year. As at 30 June 1999 fees to the value of \$17,925 have been submitted.

I think it is interesting to gain an appreciation of the kinds of people who make claims against the fund and who are successful in gaining compensation from the fund. In the last quarter, 17 claims were made by consumers who were misled by real estate agents. Eleven claimants were unsuccessful in their claims against real estate agents. Twenty-six claims were made by consumers who were misled by motor dealers. Ten claimants were unsuccessful in their claims against motor dealers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Consumer education dominates sections of the MPS. I acknowledge the importance of keeping the people of Queensland informed of their rights and responsibilities as consumers. With this in mind, could you please advise the Committee of any action the department has taken or plans to take to keep consumers abreast of the latest information and make them more aware of their rights as consumers?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am pleased to report that, even though we are operating in a tight financial budgetary position, we have managed to increase the amount that is spent on consumer education in the Department of Fair Trading. The budget for consumer education for this last year was \$373,000. This year it will be \$550,000. I happen to think that consumer education is one of the most important roles of a fair trading department. I am very impressed with the activities of our consumer education section and the department generally.

I think all members would be familiar with our much valued Age-wise kit, which is requested and used by members of Parliament at all times, and indeed has been used by Liberal members of Parliament in their campaigning material in the past. This year we have done more. We have produced a new millennium bug awareness campaign which involved brochures. We have Millie, the millennium bug, a cartoon-type figure, who is out there in shopping centres, schools and community groups, trying to make people aware of the impact of the millennium bug. She has a limited lifespan now, so she is very busy until the end of the year.

For the first time this year on Consumer Rights Day we conducted a student arts competition. That was very successful in schools throughout Queensland. We have, as I mentioned, developed the information

booklets on mobile homes. We have redeveloped the Office of Fair Trading web site. We have run a series of travel agents seminars and have produced a booklet for inbound tourists. We have developed a lecture series for the International Year of Older Persons and we have had a marketing forum.

The department is currently preparing a booklet on consumer issues to be given to school leavers. That will be ready by the end of the year because we believe that the time young people are leaving school is the time they will become very active consumers in the marketplace. I am looking forward to the launch and the distribution of the new school leavers kits. We have a number of activities planned for the following year. I take this opportunity to congratulate the department on the wonderful job they are doing in informing Queensland consumers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you be able to advise the Committee of the role of the trade measurements section of your department, which is referred to on page 2-8 of the MPS? It is referred to as having carried out tens of thousands of inspections. What exactly are these inspections, who are these "consumer cops", what is their role and how do consumers benefit?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is good to be given the opportunity to talk about our trade measurement officers because they in many ways are the quiet achievers in the department, although they have not been so quiet this year. They have been featured on national television for the great work that they do. They have been labelled the consumer cops by the media. They operate in Brisbane and our seven regional centres. They are associated with measuring and weighing everything that we use, from petrol pumps to drink measures in pubs to the scales in butcher shops and those used to weigh fish. They measure the distance in athletics events—to see whether the 100 metres is really 100 metres.

In this last year they have visited 5,694 premises throughout Queensland. They have undertaken 11 prosecutions, all of which were successful. They have issued 40 infringement notices. They have investigated 312 complaints. Ninety of those were found to be justified. They have measured for accuracy 13,479 measurements. Eighty-eight per cent were found to be correct. They have checked measured 35,000 articles. Ninety-one per cent were found to be correct.

It has been said to me that the fair trading measurements section in Queensland is perhaps the finest in Australia. It is nice to see that the former Minister, Mr Beanland, is agreeing with me here. Indeed, other States and countries use the services of our fair trading officers to measure various things. I also take the opportunity to congratulate these officers, the consumer cops, for the work they do. Often these people operating in regional and rural Queensland are out there on their own in a car. They are going into premises which might be hostile, where people do not want their measurements checked. They really are at the forefront of consumer protection for all Queenslanders.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Earlier this year you told Parliament that you intended to take tough action against the practice of predatory loan sharks who have been preying on vulnerable people in the Queensland community, providing quick-fix loans and then charging exorbitant interest rates and in some extreme cases using standover tactics to gain payment. Could you please inform the Committee what action your department has taken to curb the worst excesses of fringe credit providers?

**Ms SPENCE:** For the first time ever, I believe, the department undertook an investigation into the activities of fringe credit providers in March this year. Fringe credit providers are individuals who loan money to people who are unable to access credit through mainstream financial institutions such as banks, building societies and so on. They are operating as loan sharks and we had a number of complaints about their activities.

Unfortunately, the kinds of people who take money from these individuals are not necessarily the types of people who want to launch complaints, so we ran a week-long Statewide phone-in in which consumers were able to complain or just give us information about the activities of these fringe credit providers. We received 99 responses. Fifty-six related to loan sharks and 23 related to car finances. As a result of the report, which I tabled in Parliament, the Office of Fair Trading has launched Supreme Court legal action against 12 loan sharks for breaches of the consumer credit laws, which are administered by the Fair Trading Department. We are also launching action against possible breaches of the Fair Trading Act.

The legal action against the loan sharks is going to be quite expensive. Already, the department has spent in the order of \$50,000 on legal expenses, and the total cost of

litigation is expected to be in the order of \$100,000 to \$150,000. It should be noted that the costs of the legal action are drawn from the Consumer Credit Fund. But as part of the legal proceedings against the loan sharks, the department will be seeking fines against each of the 12 loan sharks for amounts of up to \$50,000 each. Any fines awarded by the court will be paid back into the Consumer Credit Fund.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, you also told Parliament recently that, as a parent, you were concerned about the case in which children can access pornography on the Internet. Speaking as a parent myself, what action is the department taking to shield children from violent, pornographic, unsuitable and unsavoury sites on the Internet?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am sure all members are concerned about the easy access children have to pornography and other dangerous information such as bomb making on the Internet. I am approached about this subject frequently by parents and by the media. It is difficult to legislate in this regard. We took the position that we could at least inform Queensland parents of some activities they may undertake to limit their children's access to the Internet. I had heard that there were a number of pornography filters out there that parents can buy, but I appreciate that all Queensland parents were not aware of the availability of such measures. We decided then to put out a fact sheet called Understanding the Basics of Internet Pornography Filters. It has been very well received. We have had an enormous number of requests from members of Parliament of all political persuasions, as well as schools and community groups, for those particular fact sheets. They have been one of the most successful and popular publications of the department in the past year. That is part of the consumer education program that our department feels is just so important.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I refer you to the first edition of the Employee Relations Newsletter of April this year, which states that you are committed to the improvement of workplace conditions and to addressing workplace health and safety issues. Is this in fact the case? Given this commitment, how do you explain the problem of which I have been advised in relation to the airconditioning on floor 28 of the State Law Building which, as you would be aware, is the location of the finance section of the Office of Fair Trading? This problem has seen office temperatures rise to above 28 degrees Celsius, causing great

distress to at least two pregnant workers and one worker who suffers from asthma. Yet despite numerous complaints from the workers, including to the DGs office—which, I might add, told staff they could not help them due to Estimates preparation—the problem has gone unresolved.

**Ms SPENCE:** There is no floor 28 of the State Law Building. I understand the building stops at 25. So I do not know where these people are working.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** What about the finance section of your department in the Office of Fair Trading? Is there a problem there with a broken-down airconditioner—with temperatures rising above 28 degrees because the airconditioning is not working properly, and with staff in the department feeling great discomfort, particularly two pregnant workers and one suffering from asthma?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have not heard about those problems, but obviously I would be very concerned. I will ask the acting commissioner to comment on that matter.

**Ms ZELLER:** It had been brought to my attention that there were ventilation problems on the 23rd floor, where the finance area is located. My understanding is that technicians looked at it and that there was a problem with the vents and that had been corrected. So my latest information was that the vents were working correctly.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Has there been an ongoing problem for some time with the airconditioning on that floor?

**Ms ZELLER:** I can only speak from my own knowledge. It had only been brought to my attention within the last couple of weeks, and that was followed very quickly with the information that the vent problem had been corrected.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** It appears that some of the staff are very concerned about the fact that it has not been corrected, particularly the pregnant women and the person who suffers from asthma.

**Ms ZELLER:** I understand that part of the problem relates to the fact that the original vent outlets in that building were in a certain configuration and that partitions over the years have been put in place that do not necessarily complement the airflow. That is something that, certainly, we will be continuing to address.

**Ms SPENCE:** Mr Chairman, I have just received a reply to the question which we took on notice concerning the registration application before. I do not want to use up the

member's time, but when would it be appropriate to respond to that—now or at the end of the Estimates?

**The CHAIRMAN:** At the end of Estimates is fine by me.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, as you stated before, there has been an audit of the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund. In relation to this audit, what was the total cost of the audit and who conducted it? When will you make the results of this audit publicly available?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think I mentioned in my answer before that the total cost of the audit was \$12,500. It was put out to tender in accordance with the State Purchasing Policy requirements. The successful tenderer was Worrell Whitehill, chartered accountants. I have received the results of that audit only very recently. I intend to fully discuss the results of the audit with Treasury before I make them publicly available. I have no problem with making them available—tabling them in Parliament or whatever—down the line, but until such time as I have briefed my colleagues properly on that audit, I will wait till then.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** So you are considering making it publicly available?

**Ms SPENCE:** It will be publicly available anyway through FOI. Once I have done the proper discussions on it, I am happy that it be tabled.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** That is not really publicly available. Are you going to release it publicly?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am happy to table that when it is appropriate.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, given your much-publicised dislike for Ms Jackson, someone whom you have publicly labelled as unprofessional and unhelpful, what are the circumstances regarding her position as Manager, Investigations in the Office of Fair Trading? Has her recent forced removal and redeployment not been a simple political get-square on your behalf? And how do you explain the fact that both Ms Jackson and Mr Lawson—two people who were strongly opposed to the payment of compensation to Mr Bill Kelly—have both been removed from their respective positions in the past six months?

**Ms SPENCE:** Mr Chairman, I totally reject all the premises behind that question. They are not true. They are part of this member's attempts at cheap political grandstanding. I do not believe that they are necessarily part of this Estimates program. They are human

relationship matters within my department, and I am not going to sit here today and discuss the contractual relationship of all the members of my department.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, the performance and activities of the Auctioneers and Agents Committee as required by the Auctioneers and Agents Act falls within your responsibilities. As you would be aware, licensed motor dealers, before they can be licensed, are required by the Act to provide proof of the premises, which includes local authority zoning approval and which meets the standards required for premises, as set out in the Auctioneers and Agents Act. Why was a motor dealer's licence approved even though the premises this applicant intended to trade from was a residential property—albeit with conditional approval—at North Maclean, by the Beaudesert Shire Council, when such premises clearly did not meet the standards required by the Act?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have no knowledge of that particular case to which the honourable member is referring. I am happy to take that question on notice. But I would ask the honourable member what his policy position is on this, because when the Liberal Party rewrote the Auctioneers and Agents Act and failed to get it passed in Parliament, one of the proposed changes that they made in the Act was to remove the requirement on premises for motor dealers. Does he now suggest that we should keep that in our rewrite of the Act, or should we be removing it? It is inappropriate to have that requirement in an Act of this nature. It is certainly a policy position that I am currently discussing with industry generally. As we have never had any policy positions from this member on the Auctioneers and Agents Act, I am looking forward to hearing some policy from him further down the track.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Our policy was left on the table at the rising of the last Parliament when we were in Government. Our policy on the Auctioneers and Agents Act is quite clear. Your responsibility is to administer the Act as it stands today, not in relation to any future changes which you may make to the Act, or any future changes that you may bring to the Parliament. I asked you why this motor dealer's licence was approved. If you are not able to answer the question, you might have someone here who can answer it. The premises from which it was intended to trade was a residential property. Under the Act as it stands it is not permissible to do that.

**Ms SPENCE:** If the honourable member understood the Act at all, he would understand

that licensing under this Act is a matter for the Auctioneers and Agents Committee. One of the reasons why the committee spends so much time meeting is because it approves every real estate agent's and every motor dealer's licence in the State. The committee does not report to me with its decisions. However, I am happy to ask for an explanation from the committee about that particular licensing decision.

I have asked generally for a report from the committee this year and I expect to have that in the next month or so. I have taken an active interest in the committee's work, which is more than can be said for the former Minister for Consumer Affairs who sits at the table on this Committee today. While he was Minister he did not ask for, or receive, any annual reports from the Auctioneers and Agents Committee. In fact, it seems that the committee only reports under Labor Governments. So little has the coalition been concerned with the activities of the committee that it did not even ask for annual reports. That is not going to be the case this year.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, as you should be aware, the Auctioneers and Agents Committee, using its statutory powers under the Act, has directed your officers to commence proceedings to recoup the amount awarded to Mr Bill Kelly, after representations were made to the Auctioneers and Agents Committee by his daughter Raylene Kelly, from motor dealer Mr Frank Benussi. How much money is involved in this claim and how much of this claim has been recouped from Mr Benussi?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that in November 1998 the committee agreed to grant Mr Kelly \$6,700 compensation for his claim. The committee met on two further occasions to review that decision. On each occasion the committee reaffirmed the initial decision and Mr Kelly has received his compensation of \$6,700.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** My question was: what action had been taken by the Auctioneers and Agents Committee to recoup the money from Mr Benussi?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am just trying to see whether any of our officers can comment on that matter. I will pass it over to the acting commissioner for a response.

**Ms ZELLER:** My understanding is that debt recovery proceedings have commenced. A letter of demand has been sent to Mr Benussi. The procedures which are usual in such recovery proceedings will be followed.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, I refer you to note 12 on page 2-26 which states that there is to be a \$2m administered payment made by the Department of Equity and Fair Trading to the Queensland Building Tribunal. What is the nature of this payment? Can you confirm that there is to be a \$1.8m allocation to the QBT from the QBSA budget in the 1999-2000 financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** Could you repeat that question?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I refer to the note which says that there is to be a \$2m administered payment from the Department of Equity and Fair Trading to the Queensland Building Tribunal. What is the nature of this payment? Can you confirm that there is to be a \$1.8m application to the QBT from the QBSA budget in the 1999-2000 financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I might pass that explanation over to Mr Haralampou.

**Mr HARALAMPOU:** The matter of the \$1.8m was the tribunal's allocation from last year and the \$2m is the allocation for the tribunal for this financial year, the difference being that prior to 1 July the tribunal was funded directly, under the Queensland Building Services Authority Act, from the general fund of the Queensland Building Services Authority. Since the tribunal's establishment, the tribunal's financial figures and transactions have been conducted through the finance department of the Building Services Authority.

On 1 July, changes were made to assist in the independence of the tribunal from the authority, and the finances of the tribunal were moved to the Department of Equity and Fair Trading. The allocation that is coming from the Department of Equity and Fair Trading comprises the finances of \$2m which are being paid by the Queensland Building Services Authority to the Department of Equity and Fair Trading, and then to the tribunal. So the total allocation for the Queensland Building Tribunal is the \$2m which has been allocated from the general fund of the Queensland Building Services Authority's budget.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, given your memorable comment regarding the QBSA and budget deficits which were reported in *Business Queensland* on 4 September 1998—which include this pearl of wisdom, "The practice is not sustainable. We cannot allow the BSA to continue to operate at these very large losses"—why is it that you are budgeting an operating deficit of over \$2m for the financial year 1999-2000?

**Ms SPENCE:** An operating deficit of what?

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Why is it that you are budgeting for an operating deficit of over \$2m for this financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am surprised that the honourable member wants to go down the track of looking at the BSA's finances and allowing me an opportunity to comment on the appalling financial management of the Building Services Authority which occurred principally during the coalition Government's term of office. It was while the coalition was in Government that increasing demands were made on the Building Services Authority.

I guess all Queenslanders remember the great promises that were made by Liberal members of Parliament—particularly the member for Nerang, and others—about how they were going to reform the Queensland building industry and guarantee security of payment for subcontractors. The coalition failed to deliver on all of those promises. What the coalition did was ask more and more of the Building Services Authority. The coalition required the authority to put on more staff and operate more regional offices without expanding the budget of the authority and without addressing the need to fully fund the authority.

It was during the coalition's term in office that the authority got into the financial position which caused it to go to Treasury and ask for \$3m for operating costs. I understand that the Treasurer at the time, Mrs Sheldon, said, "You can't have \$3m, but we will give you \$1.5m out of consolidated revenue to help you with your operating costs." When I became Minister and saw this, I realised that it was a position which was not sustainable. This is meant to be an independent statutory authority.

The Government immediately set about the task of addressing this particular problem. Over the last 12 months, I, as Minister, and my colleagues, have had a careful look at the activities of the Building Services Authority and we have successfully introduced legislation into the Queensland Parliament which will not only provide the authority with a sound financial footing for the future, but will also deliver laws which will improve the financial accountability of Queensland's 46,000 subcontractors and licence holders. It will also afford Queensland consumers better protection. With respect to the specific financial question that you posed, I will pass over to the authority manager, Matt Miller.

**Mr MILLER:** Thank you, Minister. The deficit of just over \$2m is primarily attributable to a forecast deficit in the insurance fund for 1999-2000 of some \$2.1m. That deficit, as I said, is in the insurance fund, which is a very significant business arm of the authority. It inevitably goes through peaks and troughs. Because it is a not-for-profit scheme, some years it makes money; other years it does not. The \$2m deficit in 1999-2000 is almost in entirety due to delays in introducing the new premium structure, which the Government has introduced effective 1 October. Some \$2m, in fact, was lost through the delay from not introducing that from 1 July. The other significant contributor to the loss in the insurance scheme for 1999-2000 is, in fact, an unforeseeable impact of GST liability, for which the authority is liable to be paying since last December.

The member might wish to note that, in fact, the general fund, which is the fund responsible for providing all non-insurance related insurances, is, in fact, budgeted to make a small surplus in 1999-2000. It is the general fund which is the fund that has been most subject to asset erosion over the past three to five years. So I reiterate that the general fund will be forecast to make a small surplus. The insurance fund, within planned estimates, is to make a loss in the current year but is forecast in subsequent years to be back in the black.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Mr Miller. I call the member for Mundingburra.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** On page 2-7 of the MPS, reference is made to the establishment of a tribunal to hear disputes between retirement village residents and operators. I have spoken to a number of constituents who are concerned about their parents' future. What assurance can the Minister offer them and can the Minister justify the expense of establishing a tribunal?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. All members would be aware that there have been demands on the Government to rewrite the Retirement Village Act ever since it was introduced into Parliament in 1988. That was the first time that we had ever seen legislation to cover retirement villages in this State and there have always been problems with the Act. I am very pleased to announce that we have been able to get agreement on the rewrite of this Act between operators and residents alike. I congratulate all of those who were involved in framing a heads of agreement and assisting the department in writing legislation that,

basically, has the support of Queenslanders. That legislation is currently before the House.

One of the hallmarks of the legislation is the establishment of the retirement village tribunal. This will impact on the department's budget and the approximate cost is set out in the operation investment proposal financial impact table, based on the commencement date of 1 January 2000. It is estimated that the tribunal will cost \$116,000 for the 1999-2000 financial year and will cost just over \$200,000 per annum thereafter. After much discussion the Government decided that we would not levy retirement village residents or owners for the cost of this tribunal and that it would be funded through consolidated revenue.

I am very pleased to say that the idea of a retirement village tribunal has been welcomed enthusiastically, particularly by retirement village residents in this State. We expect that the tribunal will meet on 40 occasions during a year and residents, or those wanting to access the tribunal, will pay \$50 to have a dispute heard, which is the kind of money that you would pay to have a dispute heard in the Small Claims Tribunal.

Of course, the tribunal is just the third stage of a three-part dispute resolution process in the Act. The first two stages require residents and owners/managers to resolve disputes in house and use the dispute mediation process. However, if mediation fails, for the first time in Queensland they will have access to a dedicated retirement village tribunal. We believe that this will be a very cost effective and successful process in settling disputes that currently residents cannot settle because they cannot afford access to the courts.

**Mr FENLON:** I note that on page 2-7 of the MPS the department has taken action to outlaw illegal market practices in respect of introduction agencies. Can the Minister inform the Committee of any legislative changes to support the Office of Fair Trading in their endeavours to protect people who use dating agencies to search for their soul mate?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question because, over the past five years, the Office of Fair Trading has received 450 complaints relating to introduction agents. The number of complaints has been increasing each year, with 65 complaints made in 1994 and 130 complaints made in 1998. We know that these complaints represent just the tip of the iceberg. People who use the services of introduction agents

and who are disappointed by the quality of the service or misrepresentation that might occur when using those services are not necessarily the type of people who are likely to complain about it because of, obviously, embarrassment or whatever. So it is becoming an increasing problem in Queensland.

At present introduction agencies are not licensed. It must be the easiest thing in the world to get a book and a photo album and open up your doors as an introduction agency in this State. In the past, we have tried to develop codes of conduct with the introduction agencies that exist currently in Queensland. I understand that they have also tried codes of conduct in New South Wales and Victoria. Really, we have not had the agreement or support of the industry in establishing those codes of conduct. So far, Victoria is the first and only State to have legislated for introduction agencies.

I am pleased to say that we will introduce legislation to the Queensland Parliament early next year that specifically regulates the industry. We expect that the legislation will not only require for the first time introduction agencies to be licensed but also regulate their activities. For example, we are proposing that, in future, they will be allowed to take only 30% of the contract price up front before delivering any services to their clients. This is not the case now: they are taking 100% of their contract price and then clients are really left out in the cold as to whether they receive the services that they have been promised from those agencies. As well, another important consumer protection will be the introduction of a three-day cooling off period for all contracts.

That legislation is presently being written. It will soon go out for public comment. Obviously, it will add to the administrative burden on our department. We expect that additional ongoing funding of approximately \$150,000 and start-up funding of \$40,000 will be involved in this new legislation. However, we believe that it is important consumer protection legislation. We are hoping that, as well as the legislation, a public awareness information campaign will fully inform Queensland consumers and basically clean up the introduction agency business.

**Mr FENLON:** I note on page 2-7 of the MPS that the Minister has undertaken a review of the Consumer Credit Code. Could the Minister advise the Committee of any benefits of this review, particularly in relation to people who need to borrow money in these times of easy credit?

**Ms SPENCE:** Thank you. You would be aware that the Consumer Credit Code is national template legislation and Queensland is the leading State in this. Basically, the other States adopt Queensland laws once they are enacted in Parliament. I understand that Stage 1 has been completed and we are currently in the second stage of the review, which involves a national examination of the Consumer Credit Code against National Competition Policy principles to basically identify and possibly reduce any restrictions that are determined not to be in the public interest. The second stage is commencing this month and is due to be completed by 30 September 2000. The reviews are funded by each State proportionally according to their population. Our contribution is 17% of the total cost, which will be approximately \$32,640.

Obviously, the Consumer Credit Code is not necessarily a subject that everyone is excited about. However, it is important consumer legislation. It is important that we look carefully at the code because it involves things like the activities of loan sharks. Once the delay that relates to the Victorian Government being in caretaker mode is put out of the way, the next review will commence.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, could you please inform the Committee of any innovations that you plan to implement since taking over the responsibility for hostels and boarding houses in Queensland, which is referred to in the MPS at page 2-8.

**Ms SPENCE:** I like to give credit where it is due. At this point, I give credit to the previous Government and the previous Minister, Mr Beanland, for establishing the Hostel Industry Development Unit, which was established in the Department of Justice when he was Minister. It has now been moved to the Department of Fair Trading, which administers the unit.

It is important that we work with this industry. In many respects, it is an important industry for Queensland's homeless and most marginalised people. They operate on very low profit margins. We want to ensure that private hostels remain economically viable in this State, and we acknowledge that they do need some assistance from Government in doing that.

In March 1999, Cabinet endorsed the framework of a five-year plan to work with the hostel industry. This is being funded by a number of Government agencies that all have an interest in housing such people. The agencies include the Departments of Families,

Youth and Community Care, Housing and Health, the Public Trust Office and the Residential Tenancies Authority. The total budget for the unit for this financial year is \$420,000 and it currently employs four staff. I understand that the strategic direction plan for the industry has now been finalised after extensive consultation. That strategic industry plan will be released for comment next month.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer you to security of payment for subcontractors. What measures and reforms have you introduced to guarantee that security of payment?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is important that all Queenslanders understand that the new legislation offers a range of reforms that are designed for security of payment for subcontractors. There are a number of financial measurements included in the legislation just passed by Parliament. I might hand the rest of this question over to the General Manager of the Building Services Authority, who I know would like to speak on this issue in more detail.

**Mr MILLER:** The package of reforms that the Government introduced into Parliament in a first wave on 26 August embodies a range of measures to address not only security of payment but also performance improvement in the industry generally. The measures include much tougher licensing under the BSA contractor licensing system. Within that set of reforms particularly, much tougher financial viability requirements on contractors. The aim is to raise the level of financial viability of contractors and, I guess, improve the overall financial viability and profitability of the industry.

Another very significant reform that is introduced in that legislation is a requirement for much fairer contracting conditions, and particularly the introduction of prompt payment requirements for head contractors of 21 days and subcontractors of 35 days. The aim is to improve the payment flow down the contractual chain and minimise the amount of moneys outstanding or at risk of contractor collapse. A range of other measures are designed particularly to assist subcontractors in the form of their ability to cease work. If they are not being paid they are able to, for example, limit their securities and retentions. Again, that is a measure designed to minimise their exposure in the longer term to non-payment. Those are some of the more important issues.

Changes are occurring in the way that the Government sector does business. It

commissions about 40% of the work in this State and it is changing its tendering processes to role model how the industry might behave in a more productive way. They are some of the key reforms that have been included in the reform package.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, as tourism is one of the State's biggest and most important industries, would you be able to advise the Committee of any action you have taken to better inform inbound tourists of their rights and responsibilities as tourists and consumers in Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Department of Fair Trading, as well as the Department of Tourism, has been concerned that inbound tourists have a greater understanding of their rights and responsibilities as consumers in Australia. Obviously, our laws are quite different from those in many of the countries from which they come.

We have heard a number of disturbing stories of unethical practices that have been used by some unscrupulous inbound tourist operators when dealing with tourists, particularly those with poor English language skills. Some operators have seized passports or prevented tourists from reboarding coaches until they have purchased goods at duty free shops where the operators receive a financial kickback. We have heard stories of overcharging and false information given to inbound tourists. The classic example is that of the vehicle hire company in Cairns that was exploiting and overcharging inbound tourists. It has been recently prosecuted in the Cairns court. The story of the Jolly Frog is a disturbing one.

We have worked collaboratively with the Department of Sport to produce a brochure that is available in three languages other than English, that is, Korean, Chinese and Japanese. The brochure will be distributed widely at airports, local councils and other areas where tourists have contact as part of our education campaign for inbound tourists. This is important not only for individual tourists but also for the image of Queensland as a good tourist destination. We believe it will be good for business in this State.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, you told the Committee earlier that there would be significant benefits to industry as a result of the changes to the Building Services Authority. Could you please inform the Committee whether those changes would bring about any benefits to consumers in Queensland in particular?

**Ms SPENCE:** As the general manager said, the reforms that we have recently introduced are designed to assist in the issue of security of payment to subcontractors by putting our 46,000 licence holders on sound financial footing. When we talk about the building industry, the group that is often not given enough attention is certainly Queensland consumers. It is important for consumers to know that the legislation that governs this industry is indeed protecting them as well.

A number of important reforms in the legislation will assist Queensland consumers. We have increased the insurance coverage to a maximum of \$200,000. Previously, it was only \$100,000. We have extended insurance coverage so that it will be provided to owners of high-rise residential units. We will have a wider coverage of contractors who can provide insurance coverage, rather than just builders. That will provide greater protection to Queensland insurers.

In addition, we have created a public register that includes details of proven disputes and actions against contractors, which can be accessed by consumers before they choose a contractor. We will be posting on the Internet—and I believe that this will be operational early next year—a list of the 46,000 licence holders and whether in fact they have had any directions made against them in the period that they have been licensed by the BSA. This will be really important for Queensland consumers. Before you sign a contract with a building company or a subcontractor, you will be able to go to the Internet, free of charge, and find out whether in fact that subbie or builder has had any directions made against them.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is very encouraging.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, in relation to the proposed retirement villages legislation currently before the Parliament, an amount of just \$124,000 has been allocated in the Budget towards establishing the retirement villages tribunal. Given the unease about this proposed legislation in the retirement village industry, particularly from residents, this amount seems hardly satisfactory for the operation of this tribunal. Do you believe that this allocation will be sufficient to cover the operation of the tribunal during the course of the 1999-2000 financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, we do believe that. We have put quite a bit of effort into costing the proposals for this tribunal. I am happy to

table the document that I have in front of me, which is a detailed financial impact table. Basically, we look at employee-related costs. I might pass this over to the acting commissioner to explain it in greater detail.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The Committee may accept that as additional information, but because of the obvious difficulty in having a table incorporated in Hansard it will not be included in the Hansard transcript.

**Ms ZELLER:** As was indicated by the Minister, the legal and policy officers concerned, who have been involved in the drafting process, researched this area thoroughly. The financial impact table basically particularises the costs that make up this proposed expenditure under the headings of "Output Impact" and "State Contribution to Output Requested", which is the large part of the costs, totalling \$205,000. Residents will be asked to make a \$50 contribution to have their particular dispute heard. If it reaches the third stage of the process that was particularised by the Minister, this equates to the cost of bringing a matter before the Small Claims Tribunal, so it is thought to be quite an equitable arrangement. But the large part of the cost will be paid by the Government and, although it seems to be a relatively modest figure, it has been researched and it is thought that it will be adequate to serve the needs of this tribunal. No doubt there will be an opportunity to review the operations of the tribunal once the legislation is in place and we would be doing that, I would anticipate, certainly on an annual basis.

**Ms SPENCE:** As to one of the savings that we will be able to make in the establishment of the tribunal, we are expecting it to share the premises currently used by the Auctioneers and Agents Committee and we are not going to be establishing new premises just for the operation of this tribunal.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I expect that this tribunal will be busy in the first three or four months. Minister, in relation to the employment of your director-general, Ms O'Donnell, and the Government's additional employment commitment in providing travel outside of departmental activities for the director-general when she commuted backwards and forwards to Melbourne in the initial days of her appointment, how many times did Ms O'Donnell travel to and from Brisbane to Melbourne, how much was spent on this travel, what other accommodations expenses were involved in these trips and what relocation expenses were paid to your director-

general for her transfer to take up her duties in your office?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that my director-general has those details and she can answer that.

**Ms O'DONNELL:** The travel that I engaged in was the travel to Brisbane to take up my position when I started. Prior to that, I travelled up to meet with the acting Director-General of the Premier's Department on one occasion. They are the only trips to and from Melbourne in relation to my appointment.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Were there any relocation expenses?

**Ms O'DONNELL:** Yes, there were.

**Ms SPENCE:** We will have to get back to you. We should be able to give you the specific figures before the end of the session.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I know that you failed to go through the purchaser/provider agreement reached between the Department of Justice and the Board of the Residential Tenancies Authority. Given that this arrangement was a method to expedite dispute resolutions in association with conciliation and mediation, why did you fail to go through with this as part of the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act? What is the anticipated cost of the survey being conducted in association with the Department of Justice? Has anyone been engaged to perform this customer satisfaction survey? If so, whom?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am pleased to receive a question on the Residential Tenancies Authority, because I know that Ms Carolyn Mason, who has been sitting here throughout this session, will be only too pleased to answer the specifics of the member's question.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** That is why I asked.

**Ms MASON:** The payment of \$1.25m was to support the Department of Justice in the Civil Justice Reform Act. It was not actually part of the amendments to the Residential Tenancies Act itself. When the current Government came to power, the issue of having the Small Claims Tribunal handling a tenancy dispute was reviewed and the policy decision was made in that department that it was not appropriate for a client of the justice system to be seen to pay for the justice that they received; that the courts' administration process needed to be seen to be at a distance from any particular client group. In that regard, the payment was not made, because it was seen that it was an inappropriate payment and that one of the criticisms might have been that justice could be bought.

The particular sections of the Civil Justice Reform Act which established a separate tenancy division under the Small Claims Tribunal have not been implemented on the grounds that there was a proposal that alternative views be looked at for improving the handling of tenancy disputes. It was seen as important to understand how people who were clients of the Small Claims Tribunal for tenancy matters viewed the actual dispute process, and that is why a survey is being done which is all funded by the Residential Tenancies Authority. We let Justice off the hook for that. We saw that one of the key issues there was confidentiality, which is why we have engaged the Office of the Queensland Government Statistician—it has particular requirements of confidentiality under its Act—and we did not go to the market. I understand that the cost, depending on how many are in the sample, will be somewhere between \$40,000 and \$42,000.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Minister, in April/May this year your department undertook what was termed as a SWOT analysis as part of the Office of Fair Trading operational review project, which was further renamed the OFT Realignment Project. This project was designed to flush out the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the department from a staff point of view. The April summary of response from Brisbane staff indicated that the staff perceived the following to be the weaknesses and strengths of your department's operations: lack of cooperation between branches and sections, lack of staff, poor technology systems and equipment, poor level of communication between branches and sections, limited career paths, outsourcing competition, staff and resources, instability, low organisational profile, quality of records held and information provided to clients. These are very serious staff misgivings that do nothing for staff morale. Given the time, energy and effort of the planned working party that undertook this review, what changes have taken place in your department to correct the perceived weaknesses and threats that your staff have identified?

**Ms SPENCE:** The negative results of the SWOT analysis basically reflect on the poor management under the previous Government and the fact that the Department of Fair Trading had been let to run down and low morale had been allowed to develop.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** You had been there for a year. You are not going to blame someone else?

**Ms SPENCE:** And there had been a lack of leadership. I spent the first year as the Minister in this department cleaning up the messes of the previous Government and introducing legislation into Parliament that you promised but could not deliver. In terms of the administration of the department, we have made a number of positive changes. I would like to ask my director-general to comment on those.

**Ms O'DONNELL:** I instigated the SWOT analysis that the member referred to because, like all the other areas of the Minister's portfolio, we felt that we needed to listen to what staff had to say to us about ways to improve the service delivery and to look at increased cooperation not only within the Office of Fair Trading but, in fact, to maximise the advantages of being in a portfolio such as this. So we were also looking at opportunities for the Office of Fair Trading to liaise with the Office of Women's Policy and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development.

I did conduct a SWOT analysis which was quite an exhaustive process involving many hours of meeting with the staff. As you are aware, the staff had both positives and negatives to say about how we were working. I might add that after that analysis we then invited stakeholder groups from the real estate industry, motor traders and other consumer groups to ask them to give us feedback about how we were performing.

Basically, what we have done is then listed all the areas of concern. I have now appointed a realignment team and have put one and a half dedicated officers to work on that. We are now looking at position descriptions to see if people are actually doing what their positions are supposed to be doing. We are talking with each branch area to look at savings that they can make, looking at ways of establishing links between different branches so that they can talk more helpfully towards each other. I chair a change management committee that meets roughly once a fortnight at which the acting commissioner sits as well and where I meet with my two project teams and other stakeholders. We talk through what changes are occurring. We are very hopeful that this process will lead to a much more streamlined operation.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Given it is IndyCarnival this weekend and hundreds and thousands will be on the Gold Coast, what initiatives has the department undertaken to ensure that security providers involved in the IndyCarnival at

entertainment venues, hotels, night clubs and so on will be monitored by inspectors from your department?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is normal for our departmental investigators to get out and check the licences of security providers at any popular time, and we do that just before schoolies week and during schoolies week and at popular times during tourist places particularly and also in Brisbane when something major is occurring. I can assure you that we will be doing so at Indy. We would be reluctant, though, to comment on the particulars of what we might be planning. We do not want to flag our punches, as it were. I can assure you that we will be there.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I can appreciate that, but given the number of people who will be on the Gold Coast and obviously the increase in the number of security providers, have extra inspectors and an overtime budget been provided for the functions they will need to be involved in on the Gold Coast this weekend?

**Ms SPENCE:** We will accommodate any initiatives within our existing budget, but I can assure you that there will be a presence from the fair trading inspectors in Indy as there always is during periods of heightened activity. I understand that our inspectors were out there in force last year and there was 100% compliance for security providers' licences. So because we are active and out there, I think we are getting good results in most parts of the State.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** I just take you back to the Business Queensland article in which you made another statement regarding the BSA. You said that it was unforgivable for the BSA to be in deficit and there was a need to cover BSA's funding in the Labor budget. Given that you feel it is unforgivable for the BSA to be in deficit, why are you allowing it to operate in deficit this financial year; where is your Government's injection of funding, as you stated would be in your Budget, to cover the BSA's expenditure; and, given that the coalition gave \$1.5m to the BSA in the 1998-99 Budget, was this just sheer political grandstanding or another broken promise? I cannot find any funding dedicated in your budget papers to the BSA.

**Ms SPENCE:** You are wrong to make the claim that the BSA will be in deficit this year and you are wrong to say that you gave a gift to the BSA of \$1.5m. That is a debt which the BSA has incurred and will be repaying to Treasury over time. To talk about the specifics

of the BSA budget, I would like to ask the general manager to comment.

**Mr MILLER:** I indicated that the deficit that is foreshadowed for 1999-2000 is, in fact, in the insurance fund, which has very significant net assets and is able to withstand that foreshadowed deficit. In fact, the fund may prove to run in surplus if the GST impact on the industry proves to be as positive as it has to date. The building activity levels as everybody brings forward their housing and renovation programs seems to be much higher than was originally thought. If that is the case, the insurance fund may run at a small surplus.

I reiterate, though, that it is a business fund. It is designed quite specifically to some years run at a deficit and some years to run in the black. It was run in 1998-99 at a surplus of something like \$1.4m. It is a not-for-profit scheme and it ought not to, in my view, be seen to be making a profit every year, otherwise we are no different to a private sector provider.

The performance of the scheme is actuarially assessed annually. Notwithstanding the recent high claims experienced, actuaries continue to reaffirm the strong performance and the financial viability of that scheme. The general fund of the authority will make a small surplus in 1999-2000 and this builds on better than budget outcomes, in fact, in the year just completed, 1998-99.

**Ms SPENCE:** Basically, I would just like to add, since we have a little bit more time left, if you want to start pointing fingers—I have in front of me the figures of the cost of the GST up until 30 September this year which have been incurred since the legislation was introduced in Federal Parliament on 2 December. So in those nine months we have already incurred an \$800,000 liability for the GST alone to the insurance fund in Queensland. This is something we have not gone out and talked about, but I have no doubt that Queensland consumers will soon start realising that things like insurance are already incurring a debt because of the GST. That is part of the financial problems of the BSA and, indeed, the insurance fund which this Government is left to solve.

**Mr DAVIDSON:** Absolutely. I remind you that your own Premier signed off on the GST arrangement with the Federal Government on behalf of all Queenslanders. That is my time, Mr Chairman.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Earlier this year you organised a campaign through metropolitan and regional newspapers to advise consumers

of a large number of unclaimed bonds held by the Residential Tenancies Authority, which is funded by the interest from those bond moneys outlined in the MPS on page 4-3. Could the Minister please inform the Committee of the benefits of the scheme for consumers and the Government and the success of that campaign?

**Ms SPENCE:** The Residential Tenancies Authority, I understand, spent just over \$4,000 on the unclaimed bonds campaign. I think that was a wise expenditure given that the authority was holding \$630,000 in unclaimed bonds, which represents about 5,000 cheques. I understand they were only concerned about unclaimed bonds that they had been holding for longer than a 15-month period. So that represents a significant number of unclaimed bonds.

The campaign was very successful and we thank Queensland Newspapers generally for their assistance with this campaign. The campaign resulted in a lot of activity in the Residential Tenancies Authority. I understand that in just one week the authority took 5,452 telephone calls about the unclaimed bonds and paid out \$22,000. All together after the campaign, about \$90,000 was refunded to the people of this State who were owed bond money. So it is still far short of the kind of money that the authority is holding in unclaimed bonds. I understand that now they are holding about \$650,000 in unclaimed bonds. So it is important that the authority use some of its money from time to time to publicise the existence of the bonds and that we, as members of Parliament, do all we can to encourage consumers to track down money that might be owed to them.

**Mr FENLON:** Other States have a privatised insurance scheme for home warranty insurance. I note with the passage of the recent Queensland Building Services Authority Amendment Bill that you rejected privatisation as an option for the BSA monopoly scheme. Why will consumers in Queensland now be better off than consumers in those other States?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thank the honourable member for the question. As the general manager of the Building Services Authority said earlier in this session, the insurance scheme in this State has always delivered high levels of consumer protection at premium cost and compares more than favourably with privately provided warranty in other States. The BSA's consumer protection performance sees consistent levels of around 99%. The home warranty scheme consistently has provided

comprehensive policy coverage, including no-fault subsidence cover and protection, even where builders fraudulently misrepresent their unlicensed status.

Because it is a statutory authority it does not have to make profits. Therefore, it is able to offer best value for money compared with private sector schemes. Being a scheme established by the Government to protect consumers, it also has a greater focus on assisting consumers, rather than profit maximisation. As well, because of the staged intervention processes involved, insurance is not invoked only when dispute resolution has failed. The importance of not merely opting for commercial settlements at the expense of maintaining work standards is another key factor supporting continuance of the monopoly.

The Government considered the privatisation of this scheme. I understand that was a policy position supported by the coalition when it was in Government. However, we believe that it was far too early to privatise our insurance scheme, a scheme that has worked well, particularly when the privatised schemes in other States are still in their infancy. We would want to wait for further evidence about how that privatisation is occurring in other States before we would want to go down that path.

**Mr FENLON:** I note that at page 4-4 of the MPS the Residential Tenancies Authority lists as an expenditure item grants and subsidies. Could you please inform the Committee who benefits from these grants and subsidies, bearing in mind the social justice platform of the Beattie Labor Government? Are vulnerable and needy groups assisted by these grants?

**Ms SPENCE:** There are a number of community groups in Queensland who benefit from the grants and subsidies that are distributed by the Residential Tenancies Authority. In the latest round of funding \$90,000 has been disbursed to nine organisations throughout Queensland. I will ask the manager of the Residential Tenancies Authority to talk about why it is felt necessary to make grants of this nature and what Queensland tenants stand to gain from this kind of funding.

**Ms MASON:** The scheme is targeted to those who are most in need of tenancy information. In particular, the RTA seeks to complement the existing community education campaigns that we have. We recognise that some of the disadvantaged groups do not

access those campaigns perhaps like you or I would. The schemes are particularly targeted at vulnerable groups. We are very pleased with how they are provided to people from non-English speaking backgrounds—we have had projects in far-north Queensland with Centacare—and particularly young tenants around the State. The Youth Action Group has provided wonderful resources through the use of comics, which is a medium through which that target group will access information. They are not going to read it in a text form, so the comic form is a very appropriate way. We have also provided for tenants with intellectual disability through a major grant to the Endeavour Foundation.

The feedback we have from community organisations is that it provides a very valuable resource and gets the information to those who need it. Part of our responsibility is to ensure that all parties to a tenancy agreement understand their rights and responsibilities. We see it as an obligation to ensure that the most disadvantaged across the State receive that information in a form that they will access appropriately.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, you mentioned steps you are taking to improve the financial viability of the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund. Could you give this Committee an overview of the Building Services Authority's financial state?

**Ms SPENCE:** As we have heard previously, the financial position of the Building Services Authority is much improved through the new legislation that has recently been passed through the House. Part of the improvements in the authority will depend on the surcharge that is being made on the insurance fund. Obviously the main source of funding for the Building Services Authority continues to be, as it always has been, from industry—from the licence fees from industry. However, Government decided that, as this is an authority that consumers benefit from substantially as well, consumers would bear some of the costs of ensuring the ongoing financial viability of the authority.

It is noteworthy, though, that the Building Services Authority in the past year has demonstrated prudent financial management over its budget. It has achieved better outcomes. I am sure the general manager would love to tell you about the increased activity of the authority in the last year under a fairly static budget. The authority is doing more with the same resources. They have had to make some changes with their operations to do that. I as Minister am very impressed by the

measures they have undertaken in the last year to guarantee that.

I will be asking the new board of the Building Services Authority to keep a close eye on the budget of that authority. Obviously as Minister it is my responsibility to sign off on that budget every year. The new board has a position on it for a departmental officer—that is the director-general—to serve as a member of that board so that I can be properly informed about the authority's financial position and also about policy decisions. As well, I intend to meet regularly with the board chair and have a close and productive relationship with that board so that we are all convinced that in fact Queenslanders are getting a very good, cost-efficient, fiscally responsible service from the Building Services Authority.

I am conscious of the demands that have been made on the authority in former years by the previous Government, which failed to address the funding problems that were experienced by the authority. The previous Government signed off on supported recommendations to double or triple the licence fees of the 46,000 licence holders in Queensland. While it signed off in support of those recommendations, it never implemented them. The financial position deteriorated because the previous Government would not take the hard measures of addressing that position.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Last year you told the Committee of the good work of the Client Services Branch of the Office of Fair Trading. Can you again comment on the performance of the Client Services Branch?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I can. The Client Services Branch, like the Building Services Authority, has experienced an increase in activity in the last year. The Client Services Branch provides telephone and counter inquiry services as well as on-the-spot counter licensing and registration services. It is responsible for consumer complaints and inquiries as well as maintaining the various databases of the Fair Trading Office. Telephone inquiries have increased, as has all activity. I have to say: the officers who work on client services in our department produce very good results in all respects. As Minister I am constantly surprised at the level of assistance Queensland consumers receive from this department.

Our people investigate every complaint that is given to our department. Whether or not we actually have a role in investigating that complaint in terms of our legislation, or even

any legislation covered by this Government, we help consumers. We act as mediators. We try to act as honest brokers in many cases. And everyone is helped from this department. We are actually delivering a high level of service to Queensland consumers, and I take this opportunity of congratulating all the employees of client services in our nine regional offices and the Brisbane office.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, you have just informed the Committee of grants given by the Residential Tenancies Authority. I understand that the auctioneers and agents fund also pays grants. Can you advise the Committee of this grants scheme?

**Ms SPENCE:** Obviously, it is important for Queensland consumers to be educated about their rights and responsibilities in dealing with real estate agents and motor traders, and we would prefer to educate rather than deal with complaints when they come in. Therefore, we have a grants program that comes out of the Auctioneers and Agents Fidelity Guarantee Fund. The last round of grants gave funding totalling \$849,940 in grant moneys to various organisations throughout Queensland.

You might be interested in the kinds of organisations that successfully received grants from this fund. The Cairns Community Legal Centre got \$221,000. Bridging the Gap Job Help on the Gold Coast got \$30,000. The Caboolture Business Enterprise Centre got \$112,000. The Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council got \$115,000. Dr Richard Dunlop of Brisbane got \$25,000 to develop school curriculum materials for secondary school students titled Renting a Property, Getting a Fair Deal. The Australian Property College received \$15,000 for some research. The REIQ received \$40,000 to fund a half-day real estate trainer development centre. And the Migrant Resource Service of Townsville—the member for Mundingburra will be pleased to know—received \$43,000 to conduct some community consumer education workshops.

The grants, I understand, are decided by a panel of people, and they are, as I said, an important part of ensuring that the consumers of Queensland are fully educated in this area. We advertise these grants by placing advertisements in the Courier-Mail and regional newspapers. And as I said, in this round of grants 15 applicants received \$849,000.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you very much, Minister. The time allotted for consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy

and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading has now expired.

**Ms SPENCE:** Mr Chairman, do I actually get time to respond to those questions on notice?

**The CHAIRMAN:** If you so wish.

**Ms SPENCE:** It is just that I would prefer to do that while we can.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Okay.

**Ms SPENCE:** With respect to the question that I took on notice concerning the registration application for Noosa Research—the business name—from the member for Noosa, I am informed that the registration application was received on 24 September 1999. The business was registered on 8 October 1999. The business registration number is 16924710. It was posted to PO Box 234 Noosa Heads on or about 11 October. Thus, the business was registered within 11 working days of its receipt by the Office of Fair Trading, not the months to which the member for Noosa alluded.

In respect to the question that the member raised about the granting of a motor dealer's licence to some dealer at Beaudesert—it is important for me to have the specifics of the person to whom this licence was allegedly granted, so that I can make a formal request to the Auctioneers and Agents Committee, and they will then provide details and particulars regarding this matter. That will take some time. As you would be aware, the Auctioneers and Agents Committee does not meet on a daily basis, but we will certainly get that information to the member for Noosa. And the director-general would like to mention her relocation costs.

**Ms O'DONNELL:** My total relocation costs were \$4,410. That was mostly made up of two air fares from Melbourne to Brisbane—one return, and the move to Brisbane—and the rest was mostly uplift of furniture and telephone installation costs, etc.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for the consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Women's Policy and Minister for Fair Trading has now expired. On behalf of the Committee, I thank the Minister and her portfolio officers for their effort in preparation for today and their attendance. The hearing is now suspended for a break and changeover.

Sitting suspended from 4.01 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.

**FAMILIES YOUTH AND COMMUNITY CARE;  
DISABILITY SERVICES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. A. M. Bligh, Minister for Families,  
Youth and Community Care and  
Minister for Disability Services

Mr K. Smith, Director-General

Mr A. O'Brien, A/Director, Service Strategy

Ms R. Sullivan, Children's Commissioner

Ms B. Griffiths, Senior Policy Adviser

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearings of Estimates Committee G are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services. The time allotted is three hours. For the information of the Minister and new witnesses, the time limit for questions is one minute and for the answers, three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. Sessional Orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers in respect of each organisational unit is to be allotted to non-Government members and that any time expended when the Committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between Government and non-Government members. In accordance with Sessional Orders, the Minister is permitted to make an opening statement of up to five minutes' duration. Again, a single chime will give a 15-second warning and a further double chime will sound at the end of that time limit. For the benefit of Hansard, I ask the departmental officers to identify themselves before they first answer a question.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services to be open for examination. The question before the Committee is—

"That the proposed expenditure be agreed to."

Minister, would you like to make a short introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning?

**Ms BLIGH:** I would like to make a statement, thank you.

**The CHAIRMAN:** You have five minutes.

**Ms BLIGH:** Mr Chairman and members of the Committee, I would like to start by thanking my department and senior officers for the hard work that they have put in in putting the budget and the Estimates material together.

This budget marks a watershed in the history of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. The budget ushers in the most significant period of reform in the history of the department. Last year's budget laid the foundations for some badly needed change. This budget allows us to drive that reform home. The 1999-2000 budget will enable us to continue rebuilding Queensland's child protection system. It will allow us to continue the funding revolution in disability services and to deliver a safer and more secure youth detention system.

When we came to Government I inherited a department that was incredibly underresourced, with little direction and little hope of change. The neglect of the previous Government presented us with a challenge to rebuild this department so that Queensland children and families receive the services they need. The former coalition Government not only failed to take up this challenge, but it turned a blind eye to it.

Mr Chairman, I am proud to say that the Beattie Labor Government has taken that challenge head on. This year's budget will see an increase in funding for child protection of almost 50% over four years—the most significant commitment by any Queensland Government. Guided by the Forde inquiry and the Beattie Government's child protection reform strategy, we have committed an additional \$10m this financial year, building to \$40m a year by 2002. This will see an injection of \$100m over that four-year period.

This year's budget will see the first full year effect of our Government's \$30m increase in disability funding for unmet needs. On top of the record \$30m, this year's budget commits an additional \$2.048m a year to support young Queenslanders through the Moving Ahead program.

This budget drives home reform and it injects levels of funding that the previous Government did not even try to deliver. It marks a new beginning in the provision of services to Queensland families and children by my department. We can achieve this reform because we have spent the past 12 months laying the foundations for change. I would like to thank my director-general and the department as a whole for their hard work and

dedication over that 12-month period and briefly outline some of our achievements during that time.

The Forde commission of inquiry into the abuse of children in our institutions was the beginning of this reform. This valuable inquiry has provided the necessary blueprint for this and future Governments to ensure that the State becomes a better parent to the children who are placed in its care. Our new child protection legislation is in place to give practitioners and the community the most effective and fairest legislative tools in this country.

We have appointed a high-level Child Protection Council to improve cross-Government and community coordination on child protection matters. We have added 30 additional child protection workers to the front line in the last financial year. We have begun rebuilding the youth justice system through re-integrating youth justice back into the Families Department. We have begun the process of upgrading the youth detention centre infrastructure. We are in the process of establishing three new youth justice services. We are reducing the detention of young people in watch-houses. We have distributed \$500,000 in youth crime prevention grants to communities to find local solutions to local problems.

We have improved our response to domestic violence by funding 14 new court support workers and introducing badly needed amendments to the Domestic Violence Act—with more to come. We have worked hard to start changing our culture, to open our doors to new ideas and to strengthen our partnership with the community sector. We have established the Child Care Industry Forum and developed a five-year plan so that we can tackle the issues that are facing child care together with the industry and the community.

In the area of disability we have made some huge advances. We were forced to rebuild the system from the ground up. We have developed a funding process from scratch. We have developed the first register of unmet needs in disability services. We have approved a new specialist agency to be called Disability Services Queensland which is to be launched in December. This marks a real shift in Government priorities and delivers a key election promise.

The development of a new strategic plan and the separation of disability services from the department have combined to trigger the

need to rethink the way that the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care delivered its services. As a result, the department has begun realigning its resources to meet the new circumstances and to ensure that it is ready to deliver the significant reforms set out by the Forde inquiry.

This year the reform will continue. The next 12 months will see 70 new permanent child protection workers on the front line. It will see the child protection legislation proclaimed. It will see a stronger Children's Commission in place. It will see new youth detention centre infrastructure in Brisbane and in Townsville. It will see the former residents of the Challinor Centre in their new purpose-built permanent home. It will see improved domestic violence laws and the establishment of a new department for disability services.

Mr Chairman, I am proud to have already delivered so much needed change and I look forward to the next 12 months of reform.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The first period of questions will commence with non-Government members. I call the member for Indooroopilly.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, I refer to your answer to question on notice No 8. You mentioned this matter a few moments ago. I refer to page 5 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. In regard to staffing numbers, you confirm that there will be an increase of 22 child protection staff in the financial year 1999-2000 and not the 70 which was claimed by the Premier at page 8 of his Budget Speech. You also mentioned that figure a few moments ago in your introductory remarks. You are sacking some 48 temporary people. Why do you persist in misleading the people of Queensland by insisting that there will be an additional 70 child protection workers added to the front line when in fact the real number is 22?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am very pleased to have an opportunity to answer this question and to address some of the confusion that has arisen about the issue. I can confirm to the Committee that there will indeed be 70 new permanent front-line positions funded from the budget. For the information of the Committee, I table a copy of an advertisement which will appear in national newspapers this Saturday, 16 October. The advertisement calls for expressions of interest for 70 positions which will be based in area offices right across the State. The figure in the MPS relating to these additional workers is misleading and I am pleased to have a chance to clarify it.

The fact that the overall increase for this output is only 22 relates to a number of factors. Firstly, the figure in the MPS does not relate only to front-line child protection workers; it includes the total staffing in that area, including an allocation of corporate services staff. It also picks up temporary and casual positions in not only child protection but across that area of the department. As the member may know, the staffing numbers that are recorded in the MPS are actually calculated using the actual numbers of people employed for the last two weeks of the financial year. So those figures relate to the employees who were paid in that pay period of the last two weeks of the financial year. They do not take an average of staff numbers across the whole of the financial year.

I am sure that the member will appreciate that it is often the case in any organisation that as the end of the financial year looms and there is excess money in staff budgets, that it is common practice for people to employ contract workers where appropriate and possible. These workers are on contracts until the end of the financial year. This results in an inflated figure for staffing numbers.

I do not believe that this is the best way that the MPS could actually give an impression of what the staffing figures are for a department. It is not only an issue in my department but it exists also in other departments where the employment of temporary and contract staff is quite a common occurrence. I have asked the director-general to correspond with the Under Treasurer about how this material is actually recorded in the MPS in future. I think that it is important that these documents provide an accurate, useful and effective picture. I do not think that using one fortnightly pay period necessarily achieves that aim. For example, while the MPS records that pay period, in fact, in the last seven months the average staffing in that area of the department has been 952 officers. That has ranged. In January this year, there were 906 officers in this area. By June there were 1,013. I think that you can see that there are significant fluctuations, even though the average over that time is 952.

I can confirm for the Committee and for the member that there will be 70 new, permanent front-line positions. But, of course, they will form part of the base and we will continue to have fluctuations above that base as spare staffing money is available across the program area and from time to time contract employees will be employed to take up the slack in that budget.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Is the Minister saying that the MPS is wrong? After all, Minister, it is your statement, not anyone else's. You prepared this and it is certified by you. Are you saying that the information supplied in that is incorrect?

**Ms BLIGH:** No, I am saying that it does not give you what I believe would be a fair picture of staffing profiles across the department. The way in which the MPS is prepared not only for my department but also for other departments is that the figure that is recorded there is an accurate and correct figure of staff employed in all categories—temporary, contract and permanent—for the last two weeks of the financial year. So you have an accurate picture of the staffing levels for that pay period. As a result of the way in which the MPS records staffing figures, what you do not have is an accurate picture of the employment trends across a 12-month period.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Clearly, if you look at the table that you have tabled in the statement, 1,013 to 1,035, the difference is 22. Let me say that it is not 70. You can come up with all sorts of excuses for it but, at the end of the day, clearly arithmetic is not your strong suit on this particular item.

**Ms BLIGH:** I think what I can confirm again for the Committee—and, as I have said, I have tabled the advertisement that will be going into this week's paper—is that there will be 70 new, permanent front-line child protection workers. However, in addition there will continue to be fluctuations in the staffing numbers. I think that it is important to understand the kind of work that the department does. It ranges right through the administrative areas where a person might be brought on for a three-month contract to do certain administrative tasks, say, associated with putting in place new information technology, for example, where it is a time-limited job or project. In addition, we have employees who are contracted from time to time to work with specific young people who might be on court orders, for example. Again, their work with that young person is for a time-limited period, depending on the nature of the court order that the young person is on or the particular problem that they might have.

So a proportion of our staffing numbers will always be temporary and contract to cope with the temporary and contract nature of some of the work that we do. What is important to the ongoing capacity of my department to meet the challenges of the new legislation, the challenges that have been set

for us by the Forde inquiry and the challenge of meeting the needs of families and children who need our care and assistance, is that we need a solid increase on an incremental basis in our permanent base. What will be delivered through this initiative of the Government is 70 new, permanent workers. They will then form part of the base. In addition, there will be continual fluctuations in temporary and contract staff.

If we are unable to find a better way through the Treasury process of recording this data, I would suggest that you will see the MPS figure next year recording something significantly in excess of the 1,013, simply because the last two weeks of the financial year next year will show similar kinds of fluctuations.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, that sounds to me like you have very poor planning in the way in which you expend your funds. That is a matter for you. But at the end of the day, let me say that it seems from both the comments that you have made and from the answer to question No. 8 that many of those temporary workers who, in fact, were doing this front-line child protection work will not be on board this financial year. They were temporary and some of those 48 whom you are sacking, in fact, are doing this work.

**Ms BLIGH:** Some of those 48 may well have been doing some child protection work, others of the 48 would have been doing administrative work—some of the others would have been doing a very wide range of tasks—because that figure records staffing across the whole program area; it is not simply a record of staffing levels of child protection workers. The entire child protection front line in this State is approximately 350 staff. So you can see from the fact that we are recording 1,000 there that there are significantly more job classifications and work types that are recorded in that figure, because it is the program staff. There is a notional allocation of corporate services staff into each of the program areas as a result of the accrual budgeting as well.

I am very confident that these 70 new staff will see 70 professional, permanent front-line positions out there in area offices where it matters. In addition, from time to time there will continue to be some contract staff and temporary staff. In terms of planning, I do not think that the member would be seriously suggesting that if an area office has some savings in staff budgets because of, for example, one of the new 70 people did not come on line until March next year because

they have to transfer to Mount Isa, that those savings should not be used, if at all possible, for a short-term contract. I think that is good staff management and good planning.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Perhaps not just in the last two weeks of the financial year, though, Minister as you seem to indicate when this occurs. Minister, can I go to Budget Paper No. 5, page 33, and in particular to the matter of Foodbank? Some \$1,115,000 has been allocated for this item. Could you tell us a little bit about Foodbank and why this money has been allocated?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, Foodbank is a facility that operates in a number of States in Australia and, in Queensland, it has been operating for a number of years. What it does is act as a central collection and distribution point for those large supermarket chains to bring food and other items that they are prepared to donate to charity. Organisations that administer emergency relief to individuals and families in need can then go to that central distribution point.

It might be best understood if I said that, before Foodbank, something like St Vincent de Paul, for example, who regularly distribute both food and funds on an emergency basis to individuals and families, as an organisation would have gone regularly to Woolworths, Coles and to some of the other large providers. They would have had standing arrangements with some of them. Now, they can just go to Foodbank, because Coles, Woolies and everybody else have brought their food in there.

Foodbank started in Queensland in 1995. When it started, it was lucky enough to receive the support of Coca-Cola, which gave it premises in New Farm, which was an old warehouse, at a peppercorn rent. You would be aware of some of the property development happening in that part of town and, not surprisingly, Coca-Cola is interested in selling the property. They are basically selling the property.

**Mr BEANLAND:** They moved some time ago, yes.

**Ms BLIGH:** Who? Coca-Cola?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Yes.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. When they moved, they gave the premise to Foodbank, which has been operating in those premises for four years at a peppercorn rent. As a result of Coca Cola now wanting to sell the property, Foodbank will be homeless. It does not have the capacity to generate funds for a property.

It approached the Government about our willingness to support it in its need for another warehousing facility. We have agreed that the project provides good services to individuals and it proves the efficiency of the organisations that we fund to provide emergency relief.

The agreement with Foodbank is that we will provide the funds for either the construction or the purchase of a suitable facility. The Government will continue to own the facility and it will be leased back to Foodbank at a very low cost so that it can continue to operate. We anticipate that that will be finalised within this financial year and that the Foodbank warehouse will be up and running again by the end of June 2000.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, is it normal practice for the department to fund charitable organisations in this manner? Were other organisations like Lifeline, the Salvation Army or St Vincent de Paul invited to apply for this or similar funding?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is quite normal practice for the department, from time to time, to make allocations available to organisations where they find themselves in some kind of emergency circumstances. We are not a large capital department and you would be aware of that. However, we had a capital program, for example, to build neighbourhood centres. In the last two years, five of those have been constructed and the last one is in the final stages of completion. Those facilities will be owned by the department, but they will be operated by non-Government organisations that we fund. There are numbers of examples of organisations that we provide some support to and that run very good services come to us because something has happened to their facility—either the city council has moved it, it has burnt down or they have had a theft. There are numbers of reasons such as that where they come to us and seek our support for help in unusual circumstances. In those situations, if we are able to help, we do.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Did the Government call for expressions of interest in this matter?

**Ms BLIGH:** No, it did not. This was not a new program. It was an existing program that needed accommodation and we were happy to come to the party. The facility will be owned by Government and it will be there for Government to sell at a later date if it chooses to do so. If for one reason or another the current group that is operating Foodbank was unable to continue, we would certainly seek a

new auspice to do so and we would publicise tenders at that stage.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Would you not agree that Lifeline, St Vincent de Paul or the Salvation Army, as I mentioned before, could do this sort of work? Is there anything special that Foodbank does that others could not do for charitable organisations as a whole?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am sure that there are a number of people who could do this work. The fact is that this group has been doing it successfully for five years and has all of the expertise in place. The Salvation Army or the other organisations that you mentioned administer emergency relief. Their core businesses are working with families, not running distribution chains for groceries. They are charged with the job of getting on with their core business.

There are some other examples where we have made some one-off grants from time to time. The Salvation Army sought the assistance of our Government in making a one-off allocation into a trust fund that it was developing. It wants to put together a trust fund, the proceeds from which will fund a significant training agenda for its workers across the State. I think that is a very good and a very efficient way for the non-Government sector to provide services. The Premier agreed that that was the case and my department has provided \$150,000 as a one-off grant to the Salvation Army to do that. That grant was matched by other Governments in Australia.

It is not uncommon for us to make large donations to charities from time to time. Charities do approach Government. Mission Australia is another example. The previous Government, for example, made \$1m available to the Guide Dogs for the Blind to build a new facility on the north side of Brisbane. That was a similar situation. The Guide Dogs for the Blind is an organisation that has existed for a number of years. It does a particular job and it was desperately in need for premises from which to do it. The previous Government made a one-off allocation of \$1m to build a facility. It was not a situation where tenders were called to bring in or invent a new guide dogs for the blind organisation. That would be quite foolish, I would suggest.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Are you aware that your colleague in Cabinet Minister Spence was a director of Foodbank until about 12 months ago?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, I am. The board of Foodbank has a number of people from both

sides of politics involved in it. It is actually a good example of what politicians could usefully be doing in their communities. It is chaired by Jim Soorley, the Lord Mayor of Brisbane. It was the brainchild of Clem Jones, who I think everybody on both sides of politics would agree is very dedicated to working in his community and has contributed much to it. From its inception, Mike Evans has also been a board member. As I said, it is a good example of how politicians ought to be contributing their skills, particularly once they have left the political realm. I congratulate not only my colleague Judy Spence but the other members of the board for the work that they do. I understand that Ms Spence left the board when she joined the Cabinet and that was an appropriate thing for her to do.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Did you meet with any of the Labor identities involved in Foodbank to discuss the funding provided in the Budget?

**Ms BLIGH:** I certainly took a delegation from Foodbank. Ian Brusasco came to meet with me about this issue, to tell me about the problem with Coca Cola. They heard just before Christmas last year that Coca Cola was in the process of selling the building. As it turned out, the process of sale has been much slower than anticipated, but at the time they came to me it looked like it might take only three weeks or so.

This allocation is not being funded out of the budget of the department. It is being funded as a special allocation from Treasury. It is a one-off payment. If we had that sort of situation with other organisations, I would make an approach to Treasury in the same way. That is why it is recorded in the Budget highlights.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Did Minister Spence ever discuss it with you or actually endorse the matter when it was being considered at Cabinet? Did the Premier discuss it with you?

**Ms BLIGH:** No. I can confirm that Minister Spence never raised the matter with me on any occasion. She noticed it in the Budget highlight documents and said to me that she thought that it was a good thing. She has never had any discussions with me. My understanding is that since she left the board, she has not had anything more to do with the organisation. I also confirm that it has never been discussed in Cabinet, but obviously it has been discussed by the Cabinet Budget Review Committee.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I understand also that a number of other Labor identities are members of the board, such as a former member of the

House, Molly Robson, the Lord Mayor's Chief of Staff, Bernie Green, the union official Dawson Petie and I think you mentioned a former Lord Mayor of the city, Clem Jones. In relation to this particular matter, you say that the funding is a one-off special allocation from Treasury. How is that to be paid back to Treasury? Is there a repayment process?

**Ms BLIGH:** There is no repayment process. The point I was making is that it is not coming out of the base budget of the department. It is a deliberate allocation.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What is the rental for this facility?

**Ms BLIGH:** It is yet to be determined, but it will be a nominal rent. We are trying to provide the organisation with the capacity to operate in the way that it has been operating for some time. I would have thought that the organisation and the work that it does would be supported by all sides of politics. I have never done anything to hide the fact that the board has a number of people from my side of politics on it but, as I have mentioned, Mike Evans is a very prominent member of the member's side of politics. This organisation is well respected in the field. It feeds the poor. I think that that is a very worthy thing and if we cannot support it, we have to ask what it is that we are doing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer to page 6 of the MPS. Given the public's interest in child protection, could you outline what initiatives have been established to address the historical neglect of children in need of State protection?

**Ms BLIGH:** I alluded to a number of them in my opening statement. They have been the prime focus of our department's work over the last 12 months. Firstly, of course, the Forde commission of inquiry was established and completed. It was completed in nine months. It documented the historical neglect of children who were in the care of the State. I have said before, and I think it bears repeating, that it provides us with a very good blueprint. In addition to the commission of inquiry, the Child Protection Act was passed by the Parliament in March this year. The Act replaces the outdated Children's Services Act. It makes available to the courts a range of flexible and relevant orders for the protection of children and the support of their families.

The Act will not be proclaimed until early 2000 to allow for the training of staff and the transition process for children on orders. However, section 183 of the Act, which deals with media coverage of children in our care,

has already been proclaimed. It is not good enough that this legislation has been passed; we have to make sure that we have a system in place that will support this legislation. To this end, officers of the department have been involved in a very extensive child protection reform strategy which has been developed with regional committees and individuals right across Queensland. Additional funds were allocated last year through reallocation internally for 30 additional professional and program support staff to be appointed in area offices across the State, again to improve our front-line response.

We also established a Child Protection Council. This high-level council was established in March to improve and increase the cooperation and coordination, and not only that, between Government departments. Although my department obviously has the primary carriage of these issues, the lives of children are not segregated into Government department boundaries. The Health Department, the Education Department, the police department, the Justice Department and the Children's Commissioner have a significant interest and an important role to play in improving our child protection response. But, most significantly, the council includes representatives from the community sector, many of whom are the people actually out there working with these children once they have come into our care. It includes representatives of some of our major service providers as well as people from academia.

In the second half of last year, I announced a six-month pilot program for young people leaving the department's care. Prior to this, it had been a pretty ad hoc matter as to how people left our care. Upon turning 18, children are no longer in the guardianship of the department. Too many of these children were then leaving without a structured leaving plan. This project has been enormously successful. It has identified some significant service gaps for young people, and ongoing funds will be committed to keep this pilot as a permanent feature of the department's work.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is very encouraging. Could you outline the costs in relation to the Forde inquiry?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, I am very pleased to have an opportunity to report to the Committee on this matter. The Forde commission of inquiry was established in August 1998. It originally had a requirement to report to Government by March 1999. We set it a very short timetable of six months. However, due to some personal circumstances

of Commissioner Forde, the deadline was extended to May 1999. The commission had a budget of \$2.8m. Despite the fact that the commission required an extension, I am pleased to be able to report that it came in not only on budget but under budget and its final cost was \$2.5m. The savings that have been made by the commission have been used to establish a counselling service for former residents of institutions. That counselling service started this week, on 11 October.

The cost to taxpayers of this commission compares very favourably with that for other commissions of inquiry in recent years. You will be aware that when we put together this commission the Premier was very keen to make sure that it did not become a spending machine for lawyers and a spending machine out of control. I think the commission is to be congratulated for its rigour and attention to its budget constraints. We can compare it, for example, with the Connolly/Ryan inquiry, which no doubt the member for Indooroopilly is all too familiar with. This inquiry ran for 10 months and it cost the taxpayers \$10m. The Connolly/Ryan inquiry spent \$1m a month on what I think is widely understood now to be nothing more than a political vendetta. Compare that with the spending of the Forde inquiry, at \$260,000 a month. I think the public can judge for themselves which of those inquiries was a more worthwhile expenditure of taxpayers' money and I congratulate the inquiry again for staying within its budget so wisely.

**Mr FENLON:** I note from page 7 of the MPS that there is a \$10m increase in the child protection budget. Given that the Forde inquiry recommended an injection of at least \$100m into the base of your portfolio's budget for child protection, can you explain how the \$10m will make an impact?

**Ms BLIGH:** The \$10m is the first step. In addition to the \$10m, the budget identifies that that amount will be increased incrementally in each year until the year 2002, when it will grow to an increase of \$40m in our base budget. Our child protection budget is around \$90m, so an increase of \$40m is an almost 50% increase in our budget over the next three budgets. The increased funding represents, in my view, a very significant first and important step forward in addressing some of the recommendations of the Forde inquiry. It will go towards addressing the 70 front-line staff, about whom I have given some detail. It will go towards improving the ability of area officers to locate placements for children who are unable to live with their families. It will

also be going towards some additional remuneration and support for foster carers and make the payment system for foster carers more user friendly. Additional funds will be allocated for child-related costs to meet the special therapeutic, educational and social needs of children in our care. This particular part of the allocation is really aimed at driving some improvements in our placement turnover for children who can be very difficult to place by providing more support to those foster carers who are taking on some of our more difficult children. It will also go towards improving the quality of care once children are in our system through putting in place improved monitoring and quality systems.

We will also be, as I said earlier, improving our transition from care for children who are turning 18 and leaving our care. The money will also be spent in the first stages of addressing the recommendations for services for young offenders and for the design of some of the programs that will be put in place in the new youth justice services. The first payment will be made into the new trust fund, which is part of our response to addressing the needs of past victims.

One of the recommendations of the Forde inquiry was also to boost the role of the Children's Commission's official visitor program, and \$100,000 has been allocated for this purpose. As I said, it is a very significant first step and it is indicative of our Government's bona fides and commitment in this area. It is money that has been delivered in a very tight budgetary context and it was one of the most significant recurrent allocations in this Budget. However, the Budget Speech records that the Premier has made his own personal commitment and he has recorded in the Budget Speech that this is just the beginning. The \$40m over four years is the first step, and we will be revisiting this matter in each Budget.

The national average that was identified by the Forde inquiry is something that we should be aiming for. Our inability to match national average spending in this area has occurred only because of decades and decades of neglect. You cannot fix that overnight and we do not pretend we can fix it in one Budget year. But I think our commitment speaks for itself.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer the Minister to her answer to a question on notice in relation to the 70 new child protection workers and also to her comments today in terms of the imminent advertisement relating to the appointment of those officers, and I ask: can the Minister

provide any further detail as to the date on which those employees will commence work?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I said, the advertisements have been placed in this Saturday's paper. The recruitment process will vary from town to town, obviously. We will be looking for a mixture of both new graduates and people with some experience. You will see from the ads that we are advertising specifically for people to become team leaders as well; we will be looking for some experienced staff. We will have to match that mix of people to some of the areas of the State. I am very confident that we can have these 70 people in place by the end of this financial year. But I accept that we might have some people on by Christmas and it might take us a bit longer to have people actually in the office in some of our more distant locations where it may not be so easy to recruit that expertise. We might have to recruit that expertise in Brisbane and then transfer those people to the new places. I think I have answered questions in relation to this quite extensively from the member for Indooroopilly. However, I draw the attention of the member for Indooroopilly to the fact that he some months ago sought information about staffing in the department through a question on notice in the Parliament. If he looked at that, he would see that there is a consistent growth in staffing numbers at the front line. But he would also see that you can track from month to month changes and fluctuations in the staffing numbers not only in this program of the department but also in others.

The member alluded to the fact that the contract or temporary staff might have come on only in the last two weeks of the financial year. I wish to clarify any misapprehension he may have had in that regard. The period recorded in the MPS is that final two weeks. Many of those staff may well have come on at Christmas or they might have come on for three-month contracts in March. I very much welcome the chance to confirm again to the Committee that our commitment to 70 new permanent staff is beyond question and we will be able to name those officers by the end of the financial year. I would fully expect that some of the staff who are currently on short-term contracts will apply for those jobs and, in some cases, they will be successful and become permanent members of our department's staff.

**Mr FENLON:** As the Minister is aware, foster parents play an important role in the care of children who have been abused and neglected. I refer to the Output Statement on

page 9 of the MPS, and ask: what steps have been taken to support foster parents and ensure quality of care?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think we would all acknowledge that, without the hard work and dedication of foster carers, child protection in this State just simply could not function. While the Forde inquiry highlighted the problems with large scale institutional care, I think it is not as widely understood as it could be. The alternative to that really is family based care and that requires families and individual people to be prepared to put their hands up to become foster parents. It means that they not only have to open their homes and their lives but their hearts to abused and neglected children, and it is a very difficult job. They provide this service often at considerable financial cost to themselves and their families. In recognition of these costs, foster carers receive an allowance which goes some way to meeting those costs. This budget will see that allowance get fully indexed, and that allowance will keep pace with the cost of living.

Over the past year there have been a number of other significant initiatives which have been put in place to try to recognise the work of foster parents. We have a legislative requirement in the Child Protection Act for the director-general to negotiate a statement of commitment with foster carers—something along the lines of the charter of rights for children in care. While the Act is yet to be proclaimed, consultations are well under way for the drafting of this statement and, in order to assist the Foster Parents Association of Queensland to participate in the process, I have recently provided a grant of \$10,000 to them for a project worker to work on this and other projects.

There have been instituted a regular series of meetings between the director-general and senior members of the executive of the Foster Parents Association of Queensland to build on that relationship. A representative of the Foster Parents Association has also been included on the Child Protection Council in recognition of the role they play in the system. Foster carers have also been well represented on some of the regional planning groups that I mentioned before which are underpinning the child protection reform strategy.

As I said, it is very difficult for people to recognise the work of foster parents, and it is very difficult, I think, for the Government in many ways to say thank you for the work that they do. This year, as a gesture in that direction, I instituted an inaugural foster care

excellence awards system. These awards were made to 13 carers throughout the State in recognition of the outstanding achievements that they have made to fostering children. Some of the recipients of that award had fostered as many as 40 or 50 children during their lifetime. So it is a very significant personal contribution that they make. This is the first time we have done these awards. We look forward to building on them and to working with the Foster Parents Association and with regional officers of the department to ensure that we can continue to recognise that good work in the future.

This year's budget, as I said, will also see us making available extra funds for some foster carers who are taking on some of our most difficult children to assist them to have stable placements and do everything we can to minimise their placement turnover.

**Mr FENLON:** Can you outline from page 26 of the MPS the major initiatives undertaken by the Children's Commission in the last 12 months?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, certainly. When the former Children's Commissioner stood aside amid much controversy, we needed to find a short-term replacement very quickly and with very little warning. It was not easy at such short notice to find a person who had the necessary experience, expertise and management skills to take over the commission at a time that was a very difficult period for the commission.

The Cabinet approved the recommendation to appoint Robin Sullivan, who was at the time the Deputy Director-General of Education Queensland. Robin has proved a very, very successful person to fill that job. It has been a very difficult time for the commission. During her time as commissioner—and she has been subsequently permanently appointed—Ms Sullivan has proved to be a highly competent manager as well as a respected figurehead. She has opened up the workings of the commission by establishing a community reference group that helps her to inform the strategic direction of the commission. As you know, the legislation for the commission is also being reviewed and she has played a very constructive role in putting forward some legislative changes that are necessary for her commission to do its work.

The Forde inquiry recommended that the role of the commission be further strengthened, and these recommendations are being incorporated in the review of the legislation that is occurring. I seek leave of the

Committee to ask Robin Sullivan if she could perhaps give some further material about some of the particular initiatives that she has been pursuing. We might need to get a slight extension of time, but I think some of them are quite worth while hearing.

**Ms SULLIVAN:** As the Minister indicated, I was acting in the position from 24 November last year and was appointed on 6 April. During that period I have established an interim advisory council with a number of relevant departmental and community representatives and, in particular, some youth advocacy representatives. We have developed with the staff and with outside input a draft strategic plan for the year 2000.

I have spent a lot of time visiting regional and rural centres. I have been to north Queensland, central Queensland, the Darling Downs, Wide Bay and the Sunshine Coast as well as innumerable listening and speaking engagements in the south-east corner. I have also developed a comprehensive communication and marketing campaign for the commission, and that will be put in place both now and after the new legislation. I have also developed a draft performance planning and review process for the staff. There had been no process of performance planning and review for the staff prior to my arrival.

We have linked the Children's Commission web site as well as enhancing it to secure and other related sites. I have also enhanced the information technology of the commission so that we certainly can provide the department in particular as well as other service providers with timely advice and trend analysis.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Feel free to continue for a further two minutes if you so wish.

**Ms SULLIVAN:** Thank you very much. I think the other thing that I am particularly proud of at the moment is the research forums that we have been holding around the State. We have held one in the south-east corner and we plan to have one with James Cook University of north Queensland in Townsville early next year where we bring policy makers, practitioners and the latest research on children's issues together. I have been quite amazed when people tell me that these three groups have not met together before to work in the best interests of the children of this State. The children of this State are nearly one million of our citizens. I think it behoves all of us to work on behalf of the best interests of those children.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to disabilities, on page 1 of the MPS. I also refer to your answer to question on notice No. 9 in which you indicated that the new department will be established on a neutral cost basis, and I ask: can the Minister indicate how the new department designated Disability Services Queensland is to be created without using an even greater proportion of available funds being spent on, in the Premier's terms, bureaucracy rather than on people with disability when, for example, the executive director position is being advertised and upgraded from SES2 to SES3 together with other reclassifications of positions in addition to such matters as signage, paint and other establishment costs?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think the establishment of this new agency is one of the—as I said earlier, it is the implementation of one of our election commitments and it is an exciting opportunity for us to give more focus and attention to this question right across Government, and the formation of this agency will help to lead and drive some of those reforms. I can assure the member for Indooroopilly that the riding instructions I have from Treasury are that it will be cost neutral, and it will be cost neutral. Obviously this involves a restructuring of the total department, and some of the SES positions that will go into the new department will be just transferred from the SES complement that is currently in the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. I think it is important that we get a very senior person to lead what I think are going to be some very challenging reforms over the next five-year period, and that is the time frame we are using to develop the five-year strategic plan.

In terms of some of the issues about location of officers and signage, it is not the case that in December this year when we launch the agency that there will be 20 new offices in place. We will have a new logo, we will have new corporate signage, etc., but in some offices in some towns it will still be the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care and offices will be co-located and there will be clear signage there that that is where the new disability agency can be accessed. We are still in the process, though, of finalising these sorts of details and it is a bit difficult to give accurate answers, although I am sure that you will continue to ask questions as we get closer to the finalisation over the next couple of months. I might ask the director-general if he has anything to add in relation to the DSQ restructuring.

**Mr SMITH:** With respect to the work on Disability Services Queensland, the Minister has recently approved the regional boundaries for the new agency and also the structure that will operate under the separate entity from Families, Youth and Community Care.

One of the specific instructions that the Minister has mentioned is that the operations in terms of both Families, Youth and Community Care and Disability Services Queensland are within the budget parameters that we currently operate within. So we are not looking at increasing either our overall operating salaries or operating budget as, if you like, a proportion of our total operations. In fact, in the last year there has been a reduction in the proportion of salary and operating costs to total directions of disability services funding. I think it is important to continue that, as a great bulk of funding under Disability Services is directed through the non-Government sector and church and charitable groups.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, surely you would agree that if you are going to incur costs, whatever they are for—to establish signage and these types of things or, as I understand, from the upgrading of an SES position—that in itself means additional costs. Those costs have to come off somewhere. You are going to either reduce staff numbers to make up the difference—I am not saying for a moment that you are—or take some other course of action, because the alternative is to reduce the funds available to go to those people in need of disability services. It is arithmetically impossible to do it the way you are suggesting.

**Ms BLIGH:** I can understand your concerns. I am equally concerned to make sure that the funds we have available for disability services in Queensland go as far as possible to individuals who need support, rather than into administering the funds that go to those individuals. To that end, as the director-general outlined, I have recently approved that there will be eight regions for the new Disability Services Queensland. Some of the work of those regions will need to be resourced by actually moving some of the resources out of head office and into regions. So rather than actually adding costs, what we are looking at doing is actually moving resources into frontline work. It changes the whole structure, because it is no longer part of the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

I can confirm that there are no additional SES positions. Obviously there will be some signage costs. One of the reasons for this is

that when somebody finds that, for example, they have a child with a disability, their husband suddenly has an acquired brain injury through a car accident or their mother acquires some sort of injury and they have never had any contact with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care, it would not be clear to them that that is the gateway into Government services. What we want is a clear point of entry into Government.

It is important that people in Mackay or Mount Isa or Townsville can actually see a sign that says "Disability Services". So, yes, there will be costs for signage. It is true to say that the non-recurrent savings that are used to pay for that signage might have been used for some other purpose, but they will be part of the existing budget. Some of those would be normal costs associated with corporate letterhead, etc. and some of those will come from non-recurrent savings. But they will come from existing internal resources and they will be kept to a minimum.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You are upgrading an SES position. There is an upgrade from level 2 to level 3.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right, but total staffing costs will remain the same.

**Mr BEANLAND:** If total staffing costs will remain the same, then someone else will be downgraded accordingly to make up the difference. Again, it is just arithmetically impossible for it to be any other way. There has to be some give and take somewhere, with respect, Minister. You cannot do it otherwise. I have said before that arithmetic is not your strong suit.

**Ms BLIGH:** You are the one who cannot count to 70.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I can count to 70 very well. We will come back to that later. We will just stick to this for a moment, though. The facts are that you upgrading an SES position alone from 2 to 3. There are probably other reclassifications to take place. So there will be a number of changes. You are going to eight regions. There are some savings in some areas, but there are also increased costs in a number of areas. If there are savings, you have not indicated exactly where they are going to be. I have indicated where there are going to be increased costs, but you have not indicated how you are going to pay for them.

**Ms BLIGH:** Part of the reason for this difficulty is that we are still in the process of determining the shape and the structure of the agency. The disability services program has a significant budget and it will have the same

sort of staffing fluctuations in contract and temporary staffing as I outlined earlier in relation to the child protection and family support work of the department.

The operational and salaries budget of the department will be kept to their current amounts. That means that we will have to find efficiencies. It means that we will have to do the work that we do differently. It will mean that some of the resources out of head office will have to be reallocated into regions. The costs of signage are as yet unknown, so it is not reasonable to expect me to be able to identify a funding source for that. It may be that some of the signage costs cannot be met in this financial year and will go into the next financial year.

It has been widely discussed with the sector, my ministerial reference group and other people that this is an incremental process. I am determined to ensure that, while we set this agency up and we put it on the road and we put our foot down and get the reforms happening, it will be done on a cost neutral basis, and that might mean that we have to take the pace of reform a little slower in terms of things such as signage, but we will wait for it.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, you have been working on this since before the last election. Now you are expecting me to believe, on the eve of this happening, that you have not done the basic work and do not know exactly how it is going to work out at the end of the day. You have indicated that you have some regions, but surely you must have done all of this other work or one would have to ask what you have been doing in relation to the planning—or the lack of planning, from what you are saying to me—in the move to this particular new agency. It was in the policy speech. I am not arguing all of that. The point is that this has been on the go for 18 months to two years. Now you come here today and expect me to believe that you do not have all of this planned out. I find that a little steep.

**Ms BLIGH:** I guess it probably speaks of the different way that we go about things. I do not use a Jeff Kennett style of Government: I do not make pronouncements on high and I do not make decisions without considerable consultation with the people who will be affected. The decision about this agency was widely consulted about with the disability services sector over the last 12 months. We have held a number of consultations. I have had a ministerial reference group working with me. That reported to me prior to the Cabinet decision. Cabinet made the decision a couple

of months ago now, but it was not until the Cabinet decision was made that we could then start sitting down and getting on with the business of determining, for example, how many regions we would have. This has had to be done in conjunction with some of the realignments with the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care.

I think it was time well spent. We could have moved as an administrative order of Government when we came in last year and then spent 12 months trying to figure out what we were going to do. I took the view that this was something that had to be done in partnership with the non-Government sector—as the director-general mentioned, the most significant provider of services in this area is the non-Government sector—and sometimes that takes time. If you want to talk to the Uniting Church representatives in Mount Isa for example, sometimes it cannot be arranged overnight. Then you actually have to collate all of the work.

I make no apology for taking this slowly and getting it right. It is important for us that we get this new agency up and running but that we do it correctly. I think it has been worth while spending the time to do that. People understand where we are going. People have had an opportunity to influence what we do. There were a number of questions that had to be resolved and they have been.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, it is to happen on 1 December, as I understand. You certainly will not be accused of being a Jeff Kennett over this particular issue.

I refer to page 14 of the MPS, which outlines that you are planning to allocate a total of some 486 adult lifestyle support packages during the current financial year. I also understand that there are some 3,613 registrants for those adult lifestyle support packages. I understand that some 1,500 were regarded as being in critical need of such packages and that these people require immediate assistance. What will you be doing about this group of more than 1,000 people whose needs are critical?

**Ms BLIGH:** The fact that you have those figures is a testament to the work that the department has done over the last 12 months to put in place a system which, for the first time, will actually clarify what the extent of the need is. Up until the last 12 months, we have only had anecdotal evidence. And it is one of those situations where I fully assumed that I would come into Government and, when we had the \$30m allocated through Treasury, we

would have a clearly established and prioritised waiting list. Unfortunately, this was not the case. And in the absence of any resources for so long, I cannot blame either the sector or the department for not having put resources into collating such a thing. This is the first time that we actually have this information. And you are right; it is a very significant figure, and it causes me a great deal of concern that there are so many people who have no assistance at all in relation to disability services.

In terms of what I will be doing—we will be doing what we have been doing for the last 12 months. We will be allocating the funds that we have available to us on a priority basis—allocated in a fair and accountable manner. But what I will mostly be doing is spending my time arguing with your colleague Jocelyn Newman who, frankly, on behalf of the Commonwealth, should be hanging her head in shame.

This issue of unmet need—a backlog of unmet need—affects every State. Queensland probably has one of the worst problems, but it affects every State. And I can tell you that both the conservative and Labor States are united in the view that the Commonwealth has played too small a role in this. Despite promises, the Federal Minister has come to the table almost at the end of the year with what can only be described as a paltry offer which has restrictions around it that are so tight. Most of the people on the waiting list in the critical category would not actually get any of the funds that she is offering, because in my view what she is simply doing is seeking to reallocate aged care dollars and call it disability services. So much of the work for me in the next two months will be working hard to put pressure on your colleague Jocelyn Newman, and I would be very happy to have you assist me in that regard in any way that you can.

**Mr BEANLAND:** But what are you going to do about these other 1,000 people who are in critical need, Minister?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I said, we will be allocating resources that we have on a basis that is fair and reasonable. There are some people whose circumstances during that period will change from critical to emergencies. We have funds available to deal with emergency situations, and we allocate them on a non-recurrent basis on a very regular basis. I am not sure whether there are any circumstances such as this in your own electorate, but I would be surprised if other members of the Committee did not have circumstances in their areas where there are people whose circumstances, while they are judged as

critical, change from being critical to emergencies. And when that happens, we are able to support them. I have to say that the 486 that we will be providing services to over the next 12 months is 486 more than would have been provided under your Government.

Part of the reason we have an even worse backlog is because there was no money put in for the three years you had an opportunity to. So not only do we have the historical backlog from the last half a century, we have the last three years when something could have been done to put these things right. And as I recall, you had an election commitment to put in \$34m each year for three years, and not one cent of it was actually paid. We are doing what we can, and I think it is the most significant allocation that has ever been put in, but I have acknowledged everywhere I have a chance to that we have a long way to go.

**Mr BEANLAND:** We did not have three years, Minister. We only had two years and four months.

**Ms BLIGH:** You had three Budgets, and not one Budget allocated the \$34m.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Two Budgets, Minister.

**Ms BLIGH:** Three Budgets. You had three Budgets.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, you had the first Budget, and you did not do it.

**Ms BLIGH:** And your three Budget papers did not do it.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You did not do it in that Budget, Minister. That is what the story is.

**Ms BLIGH:** I put the \$30m in.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**Mr BEANLAND:** That is what the story is, Mr Chairman. The Minister did not do it. If I can move on to the MPS, page 15, note 5, I ask: what funding will the Government provide to Disability Services Queensland to ensure that it receives the Commonwealth's offer of, I think, \$9m for the 2000-01 financial year and \$18m for the 2001-02 financial year under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement? In what terms will the Minister be responding to the Commonwealth's offer?

**Ms BLIGH:** I have already put in a preliminary response to the Commonwealth Minister basically seeking more information. The current Commonwealth Government has a very strange approach to Commonwealth/State agreements. It has always been my understanding that the reason Commonwealth Governments entered

into Commonwealth/State agreements was that they used them as a bit of a carrot and stick to drive State Governments to have a uniform approach to a social problem across Australia. For some reason, the current Federal Government does not seem enamoured of that approach and is very loose, in terms of its parameters, around these offers.

The Commonwealth has made an offer of \$9m. They have not sought any matching funds. In specific terms, what they have said is that they would be seeking a significant contribution from State Governments. We do not know what a significant contribution is and what it would require, so I have sought more information from the Federal Minister in that regard. I have also made it clear to the Federal Minister—I went to Canberra in April this year with all the other State Ministers, and we were all there with the understanding that the Federal Minister was coming to the table with an offer that we would then be able to negotiate. The Federal Minister came with nothing and did not make an offer until September—past the Budget process for this Government for this year. I have made it clear to the Federal Minister that any contribution that we can provide to match her offer is something that will have to be negotiated through our State Budget process. The Budget is scheduled for May next year, so the Budget process will be beginning soon. They are discussions that I will be having with Treasury. I have alerted both the Treasurer and the Premier to the Commonwealth offer but, frankly, it is very difficult for us to work on the Commonwealth offer until the Commonwealth can be a little more specific.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, I refer to page 29 of your MPS and ask: given the significant capital carryover in the portfolio in relation to youth justice, could you explain the reasons for this underexpenditure?

**Ms BLIGH:** The member would be aware that the Forde commission of inquiry's report emphasised the need for urgent upgrading and replacement of our youth detention facilities. This whole issue has a very long and disturbing history in Queensland. It is a history of unspent capital allocations, I am afraid to say.

In 1995, the Goss Government set aside \$24.1m to build a new youth detention centre to replace the severely outdated Sir Leslie Wilson Youth Detention Centre. A site was chosen by the then Goss Government. Before construction could begin, however, there was a change of Government, and this was a change that was to prove disastrous for the

upgrading of the system. Corrective Services was charged with the responsibility under the coalition. Unfortunately, the site that had been earmarked for a new youth detention centre was, instead, used for a new women's prison. Despite a Budget allocation of \$28m in 1996-97 and \$30m in 1997-98, construction never commenced under the coalition Government. A site was approved by the coalition Government by Cabinet in December 1997, but it was never announced. It was a site approved at Parkinson—a suburban neighbourhood—for construction of a new 185-bed centre. The site was a very unsuitable site. It had previously been rejected by the local community in 1987 for the construction of a prison—an adult prison—which was later constructed at Borallon. It was patently unsuitable, and it is not surprising to me that the former Government kept it a secret and certainly did not take it to the election.

The former Minister for Corrective Services, Mr Cooper, was quite clear about the need for an upgrade. He stated in August 1996 that a new youth detention centre would be built. To quote from the former Minister's statements to the Sunday Mail in August 1996, he said—

"The other two centres, Leslie Wilson and John Oxley, are in bad shape, especially Sir Leslie Wilson, and we will be moving as rapidly as we can"—

"rapidly", remember. What is more, in a letter to Windsor residents in November 1996, he stated that the Wilson centre would no longer be operational when the new centre was commissioned, "which will occur in two years." Well, despite what seemed like urgency on behalf of Mr Cooper, the former Government was unable to progress the initiative. In fact, between July 1996 and June 1998 the Queensland Corrective Services Commission, under the coalition Government, spent only \$4,138 on new youth detention capital works despite having a budget of \$30m.

This inactivity by the Corrective Services Ministers in the previous Government highlights the Opposition's hypocrisy or selective memory over this issue. For example, I understand that Mr Beanland, in his Budget reply speech, stated—

"No doubt if the responsibility for these centres had been left with the then Queensland Corrective Services Commission, the money would have been spent and the facilities would now be available for young people in custody."

I do not think so. After a two and a half year opportunity, only \$4,000 was spent. If that was their track record, I do not trust them.

In stark contrast, we are well on track to having this on time. In fact, we have spent, to date, \$3.3m. That means that, in the 15 months we have been in Government, we have spent more than 800 times as much as the coalition did on new capital works for these centres during their whole term in office. I think our record speaks well.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, given that the Forde inquiry reported on instances of abuse and neglect of young people in detention, can you outline how the Youth Detention Centre Infrastructure Plan, as listed on page 29 of your MPS, will limit this occurring in the future?

**Ms BLIGH:** The Forde recommendations went, in large part, to the need for not only new youth detention centres but for us to really think about how we put them in place and the sort of design and construction of them. We are moving to include those recommendations in our design program. As a start, we are moving to close the Leslie Wilson centre by the construction of a new centre at Wacol.

We have made good progress in the total rebuilding of the Cleveland and John Oxley centres. In terms of the new centre, close attention has been given to the design of the reception and the visit areas within the centre to allow for proper and appropriate family and visitor space to facilitate a better relationship between community member families and people residing in the centres as recommended by the inquiry. The new centre will have a significantly improved environment when compared with traditional youth detention centres. It will be designed on a centre within a centre basis to prevent there being a large scale institutional feel. It will allow young people to be accommodated in small groups within residential units which are distinctively designed to meet their different needs and characteristics as well as security levels, etc.

There has been consultation with reference groups and key stakeholders to ensure that the centre is appropriately designed. Provision has also been made for video conferencing facilities. This partly reduces the need for youth detainees to travel to court. It is therefore a significant security improvement. It will also allow contact with families, particularly those from remote areas. This is particularly important for indigenous young people. The facilities will also maximise

the opportunity for community involvement for young people detained in the facilities with a full range of educational and vocational program areas being built into the design. This goes significantly towards meeting recommendation 12 of the inquiry.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** With reference to the far-north Queensland Youth at Risk project, can you explain to the Committee how this program will deliver services which were previously available at the Petford Aboriginal training establishment?

**Ms BLIGH:** Thank you very much for the question. I think it is important to understand that, other than some horsemanship and rural activities, there were no services or programs being provided at Petford. For example, there were no literacy or numeracy courses. There was very little. This has been replaced with the Far North Queensland Youth Development Project. This project is composed of two parts. There is a resource unit which is to be staffed by full-time officers. One has already commenced and the other is due to commence in November. The project is located in Cairns.

This unit will have at its discretion an amount of funds which enable it to implement local responses in indigenous communities. This is an innovative, flexible and community-based model which I think offers us a real opportunity to make a difference to young people in these communities. It has been developed in full consultation with those communities through the Aboriginal Coordinating Council. It is a project that is consistent with the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the stolen generation report and the recommendations of the Forde inquiry.

The total recurrent funding of the program is almost \$500,000, with a recurrent annual budget of \$482,000. Petford previously received \$226,000 recurrently. I have injected more than twice the amount of funding previously available to address the issues of young people at risk in this area. It has been barely nine weeks since the first project officer commenced work. I am informed that this person has already visited a number of communities and is working with 15 young people who are already participating in the project. That is a rate of almost two a week in a very short time since the project began.

How does that compare with Petford's track record? In the last two years of its operation, only 30 young people were referred to this facility. That does not represent even

one young person a week. My department ceased referring young people to Petford in February 1998 under the previous coalition Government because of concerns about its service delivery. I am very confident that the program we are putting in place has been developed very carefully with communities and, whilst it is a very new and innovative model, I believe that it will provide significantly improved services to young people at risk of self-harm or of coming into the juvenile justice system.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer to pages 11 and 13 of your MPS with regard to the local area coordination pilots being established by your department. Can you outline some of the advantages of this model and the outcomes you expect for people with disabilities in rural and regional areas?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes. This program is modelled on a very similar program which has been operating for almost 10 years in Western Australia. While I was in Opposition I visited the Western Australian Government and spoke to members of that Government's Disability Services Commission, who outlined in detail the operation of local area coordination.

Western Australia and Queensland have some very similar service delivery challenges. We both have to provide services in extensive rural and remote areas. In many of these places there is little or no service infrastructure—particularly in areas of specialist therapy, etc. The advantage of local area coordination is that it is an incredibly flexible model. It is very consumer-focused and consumer-participatory. It is specifically designed to support people in rural and regional areas where specialist disability services may not only not exist, but never be viable. It promotes independence and self-sufficiency and is based on participation in community life.

The 1996 Western Australian evaluation of the program found that local area coordination had improved the provision and coordination of care and support to people with disabilities and their families. Coordinators in the local area coordination pilots which we have up and running will work with people who have disabilities, and their families, in a defined geographic area. They will work to coordinate the support services that people need, either by accessing mainstream services which may not have previously provided a service to people with disabilities, or finding access to specialist services if they exist or can be brought in on a temporary basis.

They will work with communities so that the mainstream services include families and make up for the absence of specialist services. They will provide information and advocacy support for families and individuals. Coordinators will not be providing services directly, but they will have access to a discretionary fund of \$10,000 per annum which they can allocate to families and individuals in a very flexible way. For example, they might be able to use funds for someone on a property out of town to employ a neighbour to provide emergency care. They may be able to provide some natural respite by funding a child's grandmother from another part of Queensland, or even interstate, when the mother of a child with a disability has to be hospitalised for a period of time.

It is that sort of flexibility and whatever-it-takes attitude, and being pretty flexible about it rather than going through rigid program guidelines, which I think will make a real difference on the ground. There are six initial pilots at Mount Isa, Cooktown, Hervey Bay, Gympie, Murgon and Mundubbera. We have deliberately chosen some very remote areas as well as a couple of connected regional areas to see how the system works in those areas. They will be evaluated after 18 months. If they provide the sort of services that we hope they will provide, we would be very confident that we can extend them and make the disability services dollar go as far as it can.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Given the huge amount of unmet needs, why have you been unable to spend the full allocation from last year's budget?

**Ms BLIGH:** First of all, I can confirm to the Committee that last year's budget allocation has now been spent. As I alluded to earlier, the system that I inherited was one for which we had no data at all on the extent of unmet needs. There were no waiting lists. There was no system for allocating funds either fairly or transparently. There was very little accountability. We had a system where people had to fit wherever the services were available and this was caused largely, as I said, because of chronic underresourcing in the past.

Over the last 12 months a revolution has begun in disability services. We have developed a service which now funds individuals rather than services. The individual is the person who has the funds allocated and approved for him. He then goes and buys the services for himself in his local area.

We have developed a system which accepts responsibility for supporting families and children with a disability rather than abandoning them to their own resources and often having to pick them up in the child protection system when they cannot cope any longer. We have developed a system which allocates funding according to the criticality of need, not according to which electorate a person lives in or where they have strong advocates or where they can work the media.

A revolution like this does not just happen overnight. As I said earlier, it takes time to consult with the sector and to make sure that we get it right. We have held a total of 148 focus groups and workshops over the past 12 months to consult with the sector on the new directions. It takes time to build up the infrastructure, both Government and non-Government, and to employ and to train staff to take up these new services.

We have had to establish priority panels. We have had to develop application forms. We have had to determine criteria for how to establish criticality of need. \$15m of our \$30m election commitment was available for expenditure from 1 January in the 1998-99 financial year. The audited carryover was \$4.1m. I am advised that \$3.3m of this carryover was committed at the time of the carryover.

It is important to understand that the process of allocating this lifestyle support package is one where individuals have the opportunity to negotiate with service providers about what it is that they want. This is the first time that this has happened. It takes people a while to get used to it. It may be that in some towns people have been provided with money and there is no service in the town. Either one has to be invented or a very small service might have to put on two new staff. It is not an easy thing to find two suitable staff who want to work with people with disabilities. They might need training, etc. So, whilst the funds were committed, the actual money had not been expended because in many cases the individuals were still negotiating with service providers.

So that lag time is not a bad thing. That lag time is actually a good thing: it builds into the system some power for the consumer, but it does take a little time. If we take out the committed funds, the remaining carryover was only \$0.8m or just 5% of the total funding available. I think that, in the context of the funding revolution, that is a pretty good record.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, I refer to pages 11 and 29 of your MPS and ask: what is the current status of establishing an alternative residential facility for the former residents of Challinor?

**Mr BLIGH:** Thank you very much. This was one of the first challenges that I had when I took over the portfolio and we have made some very significant and important progress on it. When I took over this portfolio, Challinor had been sold to the University of Queensland and there was, I think, little more than about five or six weeks until the expected date of takeover. While we managed to negotiate a bit of an extension, it still left us with a situation where 54 residents of the former institution faced homelessness. There were no short-term or long-term solutions in place for any of them; there was no site finalised or located for either of the two centres that had been promised.

Since then, interim accommodation has been found for all of these 54 people, either in community housing or at the Basil Stafford Centre on a temporary basis. Some people have chosen to remain in their interim accommodation. There are four people who have chosen to live permanently in the accommodation that was found for them at a facility called McPherson Lodge and two people have decided to stay on at Basil Stafford.

The centre at Loganlea is almost completed. Tenders closed for the centre on 4 December last year. There was a sod turning on 12 March and, on all reasonable predictions, we expected that it would be operational by the middle of the year around July. Unfortunately, due to one of the wettest Brisbane winters on record—and I think that many, many building projects failed to predict that—people will now be moving into their houses by the end of this month. There will be 23 people in seven separate houses.

It took us some time to locate a second site but there is a site now identified at Bracken Ridge. It is on schedule to go out to tender in December. Twelve people will be located in four separate houses on this site. The design has been finalised with the assistance of a family reference group. The involvement of families and the individuals themselves in this whole process has been a key feature of the work that has been done to date. I am pleased to say that both of these centres are going to be located in communities that have been well consulted about the location of this facility and the people who will be moving there. Both of these centres will be

in neighbourhoods where they will be welcomed, where communities are supportive and where they are close to shops, services and transport.

I think that this has been a very controversial and difficult issue, but I am very pleased with the way in which the program has progressed. Some of the officers have been out on a regular basis tramping the streets doorknocking houses, talking to people about the people moving from Challinor. I spoke about this at the Estimates committee last year. I think that it has been a very open process. We have been very pleased with the kind of community support that we found in both Loganlea and Bracken Ridge. I commend not only the officers of my departments but also the communities involved for the open arms that they have extended to 54 people who would have otherwise been homeless.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Indooroopilly.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, I refer to note nine on page 15 of the MPS and ask: what is the breakdown of the figures for Project 300, the enhancement to disability services proposal, the increase in unmet needs funding and the unspent grants carried over?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am unable to give you that detail at the moment, but I am happy to take the question on notice and we can provide it to you after the break.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Thank you, Minister. I refer to the same note on the same page of the MPS in relation to taking from the Health Department the responsibility for 300 people from psychiatric hospitals with a transfer of only \$12.4m from Health. Allowing for the 5% administration cost, which is your benchmark figure, this amounts to less than \$40,000 per person for packages that are likely to cost a great deal more than that on average. Minister, I was wondering what additional funding have you received to provide these particular services?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. This project also has had a chequered history. It was an initiative of the former Labor Government and it was an initiative that strove to provide opportunities for people with a psychiatric disability and who were inappropriately residing in psychiatric wards of hospitals to move into the community where they would be able to live with some community support outside of those institutions.

The project aimed to give 300 people that opportunity. I am actually not sure of the background. Given that the primary focus of this project was to move people out of a medical, hospitalised setting and into a community setting where they would have community support, the project was originally located in the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care where the disability program has extensive experience and expertise in the process of community support. Unfortunately, for reasons best known to himself, the former Minister, Mr Lingard, either through a lack of interest or just unwillingness, had the project transferred to the Health Department, which was under the auspices then of the then Minister, Mr Horan.

The project took some time between being transferred there and transferred back. When we discussed this before the election, the Minister for Health shared my view that the community support focus of this project should be retained and it should be moved back. It has been moved back. The average cost I will get to you after the break. Not all of the people in this project require full-time accommodation support. Some of them require assistance—some regular contact to help them with things like shopping, financial management and medication—but they do not necessarily need 24-hour care. That is one of the reasons why they are being relocated out of hospital settings. So I can certainly give you the average cost per client in the project to date after the break, but you will find that there is, as there is in the disability program, people who, with a very, very small amount of assistance, can live very, very satisfactorily in the community whereas other people require 24-hour, very expensive assistance and there is everything in between. So you will find that gamut in this program as well. I would be very happy to come back to you after the break with some accurate costings on that.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Thank you. Minister, I refer to the output statement on page 14 of the MPS in relation to services for people with disabilities. Why did you fail so miserably to meet your target of 174 families for support under the new Family Support Initiative with only 13 families actually receiving the benefit? How can the community believe that you will now meet this year's target of 262 when more than 160 families missed out last year?

**Ms BLIGH:** Just give me a moment to locate the line in the MPS.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You have the big book; I have only a little book. You have the details, Minister.

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes. I think that it is important to recognise that, in terms of the disability program, so many things are happening at once in a six-month period. As I have said, we were revolutionising the funding process. We have actually had to not only start it from scratch; we had to put it into place and implement it. We had to put in place significant processes to get the disability agency up and running and many, many other challenges. I think that it is fair to say that we set the bar pretty high and we did not meet all of the goals that we set ourselves. But we do not resile from the fact that it is important to set targets and to set goals.

The flexible family support issue is one that we are well on track now to meeting. There were certainly delays in its implementation, but the delays were associated with developing the right models, as well as—once the models were developed—actually identifying the number of children and families who might be able to access it. It was also a result of recruitment processes for suitably qualified staff and appropriate training for facilitators.

As I have said earlier, this whole area of work is a new area of work for the disability program, and it did require the recruitment of some staff with expertise in working with families. I regret that we were not able to move the program along a little bit faster than we were, but we are well on track to meeting the target of 262, and many of those have now been funded. It is all part of doing a lot of things at once.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The hearing is now suspended for a short break and we will resume at 6 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 5.44 p.m. to 6.04 p.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearings of Estimates Committee G is now resumed. Minister, I invite you to supply answers to questions taken on notice?

**Ms BLIGH:** I would like the opportunity to address the questions from the member for Indooroopilly that I took before the break. Firstly, I refer to the question from the member for Indooroopilly regarding note 9 on page 15 of the MPS. The reasons for the increase in grants and subsidies between 1998-99 and 1999-2000 of \$41.339m is primarily a result of a combination of the following factors: firstly, the full-year effect of the Unmet Need initiative, an enhancement of disability services for the Moving Ahead program, the transfer of Project 300, the net impact of the carryover from the

last financial year, funds available through the CSDA for this year and the balance is some small grants and escalation.

In relation to the question from the member for Indooroopilly in relation to the transfer of Project 300, part of the difficulty is that while the project was originally designed to move people with psychiatric disabilities out of psychiatric facilities, as the project progressed it was also found that a number of people with intellectual disabilities were inappropriately located in those psychiatric facilities. The project has slightly widened its net to include the kinds of people who would be targeted through the project's resources. By targeting people with an intellectual disability, some of the per capita costs have risen.

I presume that the target of the member's question is whether or not this is still Project 300 or some other number. I confirm that there is ample funding this year to move people progressively from psychiatric facilities. We are quite confident that the funds will be there for the following year. Whether or not the 300 target can be achieved has to be reviewed as we go through the process of relocating people and determining the basis of their needs. If we are unable to meet the 300 target, that will have to be reviewed in the context of subsequent Budgets.

On current rates, the average cost per package is about \$55,000. On that basis, it is unlikely that the 300 target would be met, but it is also possible that a number of people would be moved whose costs were less than that average. It is a question that we will have to review as we continue.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I can say to the Minister that with \$55,000, you will not get 300.

**Ms BLIGH:** No.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You are well shy of the mark by anybody's calculations.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. That is the current average of the people who have moved so far.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You will be well shy of the mark, because under \$40,000 is the average when you calculate it out, taking into account your administration charges.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Going back to your previous answer, could I have the figures that go with those items, which is really what I asked for?

**Ms BLIGH:** Certainly. The full-year effect of the Unmet Need initiative is approximately

\$14m, the enhancement of the Moving Ahead program is \$2.048m, I think, but \$2m for this purpose, Project 300 was \$12.4m, the carryover was \$6.2m and the CSDA funds were \$5.4m. I do not have the figure for the balance, but it is small grants and escalation costs.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I return to the question I asked prior to the adjournment in relation to the target number of families to receive support in 1999-2000, which is 262. Do we have a guarantee that you will get to that figure of 262 or is that just a figure that you are going to target, like the figure of 174 was last year when we only got to 13? You have indicated that you want to get there, but do you give any guarantee to the Committee that you will get there or is it just a figure that we hope to get to?

**Ms BLIGH:** No. The figure has been determined on the basis of the budget allocation that has been made for family support services. Like every other figure in the MPS, it is an estimate. However, as I said, I am very confident that we will get there.

We have allocated a total of \$7.7m of the \$30m initiative for both family support and programs for children with disabilities in care. There are three components to the program and they involve varying levels of support for families, depending on their needs. The first one is the Kids in Care program, which provides additional funding for children with disabilities in care. The second two are new. The Intensive Family Support program provides families with packages of support up to \$25,000. It aims to support families at risk of breakdown and to prevent children from coming into the care of my department because their families cannot cope any longer. The other program is a Flexible Family Support program that provides families who are accessing non-Government service providers with flexible support.

The breakdown of our estimate is 22 children with disabilities in care, 110 children accessing intensive family support and 130 families accessing the flexible family support. As I said, it is an estimate, but the delays that were experienced in getting the program up and running are no longer with us. The program is running and the budget is there for it. I see no reason why we will not meet the estimate. In fact, we might even supersede it, happily.

**Mr BEANLAND:** We wait to see that. I turn to page 14 of the MPS, the Output Statement. What reasons other than wet

weather caused delays in developing respite services so that 0% was achieved against a 90% target? Why will 100% of the target not be reached in 1999-2000? That is under the Timeliness section.

**Ms BLIGH:** The respite program of the department focused on facilities in both north Queensland and Brisbane south. Funds of \$1.2m were allocated under the mid-year review of the Unmet Need initiative of the previous Government in 1997-98 for the construction and operation of day respite centres on the Gold Coast and in north Queensland. The Gold Coast facility is now up and running. It was completed on 30 July so it is not recorded in this MPS, but it is now up and running.

The service providers in north Queensland were very concerned that what was really needed in north Queensland was not necessarily a bricks and mortar facility. They were also concerned that there had been very little consultation with the sector and service providers in the region about what they actually needed. During a period of some considerable consultation significant support was found for funding of flexible models for both in and out of home respite on an individual basis.

We are in the process at the moment of determining the final allocation of north Queensland funds. In consultation with the disability services sector we have put out a discussion paper proposing that the funds that were allocated in the first instance for the operation of a single service located in Townsville be allocated between Townsville and some of the outlying areas so that those people who are most in need of respite can access it in the towns in which they live. I think that will be a much better model for the people in that area. I am confident that we are on target. We have already met 50%. The facility on the Gold Coast was operational since 30 July and the north Queensland facility is the subject of a final discussion paper to determine allocation.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to page 12 of the MPS and to future developments for disability services. The five dot points on that page state that the new separate department, Disability Services Queensland, will be able to undertake its new mandate, especially its published responsibilities, to—

"... ensure that a strategic approach to disability issues is developed across Government;

lift the profile of disability issues ...

establish a clear role for Government in enabling people with disabilities to access, participate in and contribute to their communities; and

develop innovative ways to build a strong partnership with the Disability Sector."

How can this be done without additional infrastructure and resources? You have also indicated that there is to be no increase in budget or staff in establishing this new agency. How can these additional responsibilities be undertaken?

**Ms BLIGH:** Part of it is a cultural shift, determining our internal priorities, leadership and determining new ways of doing things. I refer to some of your previous questions in this regard. My information is that upgrading an SES 2 position to an SES 3 position brings with it a total cost on an annual basis of about \$5,000. A decision, for example, to change the home garaging policy of the department would see, with the simple change of one car not being home garaged any more, a saving of \$10,000 to the department. This department administers a very significant budget. We have the challenge before us of managing the targets that we have ourselves within our budget. They are management decisions and they will be taken as needed as we go along. Part of it is about resources. There is no doubt about that. Part of it is about how we do the business that we do. Some of that requires significant rethinking and it involves work with our non-Government partners. I am very confident that part of what we need is, as I said earlier, a cultural shift on both the part of Government and non-Government providers. We need some new mechanisms to drive that shift and that is what this agency will be doing.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Page 15 of the MPS lists some total amounts. I understand there is some money in there for the Queensland Disability Sector Training Fund, which is to be managed by the Australian Human Resources Institute. What will the institute do with the funding and how will it assist Queenslanders with disabilities?

**Ms BLIGH:** The whole question of staff development and training right across the department has been neglected for a very long time. Not surprisingly in an underresourced context, the department has for a long time done everything it can to get the resources that it has out into service delivery. On many occasions that has been done at the expense of the development of our own staff and giving them career

opportunities and the opportunities to develop their expertise and build on their experience. The training and development strategy that has been worked on in the department is one that I think will see significant improvements in our response in that regard. We made a decision to look at the Australian Human Resource Institute to manage a training fund on behalf of the department. I might ask the director-general to give you some more details on that.

**Mr SMITH:** The Minister approved that sector-wide training and skills development strategy in May of this year. Funds were set aside from the Unmet Needs allocation for training and skills development sector-wide—not just in the Government sector but also in the non-Government sector—to look at a range of work force planning issues and skill development within that work force. To achieve that, \$800,000 was set aside in that trust fund to be supplemented as required, and steps have been taken to develop that work force planning strategy. That is within a more general context of improving training and development for professional staff of both organisations—the new Disability Services Queensland as well as the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care—and significantly increasing funding for tertiary courses for both people's first, or undergraduate, degree or postgraduate degrees through the SARASS study and assistance programs.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to page 14 of the MPS and to the number of families needing funding under family support initiatives. What data does the department have in relation to unmet needs of children with disabilities and their families caring for them, and how did the department collect that data?

**Ms BLIGH:** The majority of the information that we have about children with disabilities and the families that are caring for them has been gathered by people contacting the department and seeking help. At this stage, we do not have a registration of need process for children. That process has not been put in place for children and I am not confident at this stage that that is the appropriate process by which we might gather the data. Many of the children who will be accessing the intensive support and family support programs are children and families who are already known to the department because of an inability to access services in the past, and they will be the ones who are getting priority. But if you would like some more information on how we are doing that,

we can ask the Program Director, Disability Program to give us some more information.

**Mr FRANCIS:** Initially, we did a survey through the department and through non-Government providers which identified some 70 families who had a requirement for intensive support, that is, the sort of support that meant that their family was in urgent need of assistance to prevent breakdown and where the children within those families were at high risk of coming into the care of the department through the director-general. The Intensive Family Support initiative was predicated upon that research. That research also went further and looked at broad policy initiatives that led us to construct the subsequent Flexible Family Support initiative. The question you asked also related to the extent to which we are addressing unmet need within families and developing the registration process for Unmet Needs. Currently, work is under way to extend the Unmet Needs registration process, which at the moment deals with adults, to families. I do not have a specific time frame as to when that process will be delivered, but it is a priority piece of work at the moment.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You ask people to register as you have for the adults; is that what you are saying?

**Ms BLIGH:** We have not as yet, but we are at the moment investigating whether the current registration of need process is suitable for families and children and, if not, whether a slightly amended process might be, as I said, a corollary to the existing one. It might be that you would have different panel members with some particular expertise or experience in working with children, for example, so that applications on behalf of children may not be assessed by the same panel. Those are the sorts of issues that some work is currently being done on. These services will be able to be provided to some of these families long before that process is determined.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to pages 11 and 14 of your MPS and the new funding for family support programs and ask: how will these programs benefit families of children with disabilities?

**Ms BLIGH:** I have already answered some of the questions in relation to this, but I am pleased to have an opportunity to give the Committee some more information. The area of working with families is one that departmental officers have personally experienced for a long time in not being able to provide the resources. I think that there are a number of families out there who we will

have a much greater chance of working with and providing them with the necessary support so that they can actually care for their own children in their family context, as many of the families who come into contact with our department want to do but have to date been unable to do because they could not access very many support services. A number of children who have come into our care and protection are there not because they are at risk of harm, but because their parents are unable without appropriate support services to continue the task of providing family support to that particular child, particularly given that a number of these families often have other children who also have needs and requirements.

What the program that we are putting in place means is that, if a child has a disability, their family now can get flexible support designed to meet their needs. It might be in some cases counselling, in other cases it might be housework, it might be to assist the child in helping them to access existing community services. Previously only limited respite was available and families had to take what they could get. This is really about trying to work with families to design—it is along the lines that I was talking about earlier in relation to the local area coordination services—what it is that their family needs to support them with this particular child. Their family needs may be very different to another family's needs. We have accepted responsibility with this new funding program for supporting families with children with disabilities and trying to provide services that mean, as I said, children do not unnecessarily come into our care.

**Mr FENLON:** I refer to page 14 of your MPS and the reference in the 1999-2000 budget of 4,126 people receiving respite. I ask: are you confident that this target will be reached?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes. Respite can be provided in a number of ways. It can be provided by specialised respite services or centres or it can be provided through individual packages of support. Some of the new initiatives in 1998-99 that will contribute to our capacity to meet this target include, firstly, as I have outlined before, the Gold Coast Family Support Service, which is operating a day respite service. It had been operating in a temporary facility since November 1998 but now has its permanent facility on board in July 1999. There have been two rounds of funding for adult lifestyle support packages. There has been an allocation of non-recurrent funding to a number of respite services in north

Queensland, and we are still going through the process of determining the outcome for permanent recurrent funding for a number of those services.

Emergency respite funding of \$500,000 has been provided to non-Government respite service providers over the last 12 months. That funding in the last 12 months has already resulted in a significant increase in people receiving respite. At the time the MPS was being put together this data was not available to us, but results from the May 1999 census which compiles what is known as the minimum data set under the Commonwealth/State Disability Agreement shows that total respite users in Queensland have increased from 4,046 in 1998 to 4,446 in 1999. It is an increase of 400 users, which means that our target of 4,126 has already been well exceeded and I would anticipate that that sort of growth would continue.

Since the data has been collected, there is another round of lifestyle support funding in the pipeline. I have started to approve some of those packages now. Flexible family support and intensive family support services have been established and families are beginning to access that. A significant amount of that funding can be allocated for both in home and out of home respite services. When an individual or the family gets the money, they can then go and get respite. I am very confident that our target in that regard will be met—it has already been met—and I am very confident that it will be superseded.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I take you back to pages 11 and 14 of your MPS where you have referred to individual adult lifestyle support packages. I ask you to explain how these packages are allocated.

**Ms BLIGH:** I think if I go through this process it might help the Committee to understand why the process is not one that can be rushed and why it is not a speedy process. It has built into it a number of points, both an opportunity for community involvement and for significant accountability measures. First of all, the first stage is to publicly advertise the public funding round, which has not always been the case. There were certainly times in the past when so little funds were available that there was no point going through a public advertisement; simply those people who were in emergency crisis got access to them.

People are then able to apply for a package and they register their need. The application is assessed by regional priority

panels which comprise both departmental representatives and, in three of our five regions, the panels also comprise representatives of the non-Government sector. Having community representatives on the panel has been successful. The fact that there are only three out of the five is an indication that we were not sure how that would go and neither was the community, and we trialled it in three regions. It has been very successful and it is likely to be implemented in all regions in the next funding round.

Priority panels meet and assess applications from right across their region. There is one in each region. So it is about local people on the ground having knowledge of what is available and what the services are. They are assessed according to a number of set criteria. So it is not simply a matter of making a determination, for example, about the level of someone's disability or the nature of their disability. The sorts of criteria that are assessed are the risk that person may be at of some violence or abuse in their current circumstances, the age or health of their primary carer, the temporary nature or otherwise of their current support arrangements, the risk that there might be of them having some involvement in the criminal justice system, homelessness, whether the person is at risk of institutionalisation or whether they have deteriorating abilities because of insufficient support or the nature of their disability.

The panels then prioritise the application on the basis of that assessment. It prioritises people into four different priority areas. Priority 1 indicates people who are at immediate to high risk, extremely critical and in urgent need of some form of immediate intervention. Priority 2 recognises high to moderate risk in the near future. Priority 3 is at potential moderate to low risk in the longer term and priority 4 is people who need some support to enhance their general quality of life.

Each region makes recommendations for funding based on the priorities that are established by the panels. One of the issues with this model is that the person in crisis may miss out on a package because they live in an area where there are lots of other people in critical need, while someone with a lower priority might get a package because they live in an area where the need is not so great. To try to balance that possibility, we also have a central moderation process where 20% of the available funds are held in a central pool to allocate to people on a Statewide basis.

One of the advantages of this model is that people then get an opportunity when they have had their package approved by me in principle to negotiate with service providers. So the power is in the hands of individuals. While the money goes to the service they nominate, they can move it at any time if they not happy with the service.

**The CHAIRMAN:** With reference to page 9 of your MPS, I am particularly interested in the participation of young people in Government decisions that affect their lives. What initiatives have been put in place to meet Labor's commitment to include young people in this decision-making process?

**Ms BLIGH:** We came into Government with a commitment to improving the participation of young people in the decisions of Government that may affect their lives. It is not an easy business. We have a very wide State and young people are not a homogeneous group. Our department categorises young people as people up to 25. There is a great difference between a 15 year old, a 19 year old and a 24 year old. They are at very different stages of their lives. Nevertheless we think it is important that people in this age demographic have an opportunity to know what Government is doing, to be part of the decision-making process and to have a capacity to influence and shape Government activity.

We have put together a draft strategy, which we circulated for consultation in August and September of this year. The consultations closed on 17 September. The strategy we put forward is just a proposal, and I am hopeful that some of the consultations would have drawn out other ideas from individuals and from people in organisations that work with young people. I think it is fair to say that, because of the diverse nature of young people, no one strategy is going to work. We have to have a sort of jigsaw, if you like, of things that will be attractive to different sorts of people.

The strategy proposes firstly a youth advisory council, which would advise me as the youth Minister and would also be available to advise other Ministers who might have an interest in young people's views on particular proposals—particularly other Ministers who have responsibility for young people, such as the Education Minister.

We have proposed an interactive web site for young people. We actually have that up and running. We put it forward as part of this package, but it is up and running. It is called

Generate. It is very much in its first stages, but we anticipate that over time it will be for those people who have access to computer technology and the Internet—that number is growing at a very rapid rate for that age demographic—an opportunity for them to actually access Government information. Also, it is interactive in the sense that it will give them the opportunity to feed back on particular ideas. So particular Ministers could put out a proposal and, instead of putting out just a consultation paper, actually put some material on to the web site and young people would be asked to immediately provide some feedback. We also anticipate that it will be interactive in the sense that Ministers of the Government will be available to talk on line with people. We are in the processing of organising the Premier as the first on-line chat host. We are looking forward to that.

The strategy also proposes looking at ways of getting more young people, where appropriate, on Government boards and decision-making bodies. We are looking at either a registry of young people with an interest or at somehow amending or refocusing the existing registries of people with an interest on boards and looking at providing some resources where there are existing local level consultative networks of young people that are obviously effective and working but which might just need a bit of support.

We have had over 300 individual feedback forms. They have not been collated for my consideration yet. We are well on track to having those things up and running by the end of this year and early into the new year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you be able to outline for the Committee the initiatives you have established to help meet the Government's jobs target?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am very pleased to have an opportunity to discuss this matter with the Committee. Often I think people assume that the only departments that drive job creation are those that have large construction budgets, but there are many areas in my department which are seeing significant job growth, particularly in the non-Government sector, and job growth for sections of the labour market that would not be able to access job growth that is created through, say, capital works programs.

In disability services, for example, it is estimated that the \$30m disability initiative will create more than 800 jobs when all programs are fully implemented in this financial year. That is using a notional figure of about

\$35,000 per job. That is about the average wage in this industry. For example, in north Queensland that will mean over 90 jobs alone—and they will be permanent jobs. It is estimated further that there will be an additional 19 permanent jobs created as part of the Basil Stafford initiative to support people wishing to move out of that institution.

In the child protection area, I have already talked about the 30 extra frontline staff we put into the area last year and the 70 new workers in the next financial year. The number of new frontline workers will rise to an extra 250 in the year 2002.

A significant amount of the funding that has been made available to respond to the recommendations of the Forde inquiry will also be allocated to the community sector, which will see the creation of jobs in this area of work. Those jobs will be spread right across both regional and remote Queensland.

Our department has also played its role in the Government's traineeship program. Over the past financial year the department has engaged 74 trainees across the State. Where the retention of successful trainees within the department is possible, they will be offered ongoing temporary or permanent work. The department is expecting to engage a further 80 trainees over this financial year.

Our jobs strategy is not only about creating new jobs but also about making sure that we secure the jobs in particular industries and provide some support and assistance to industries in which jobs might be under threat. The child-care sector is an example of an industry where in many areas its viability is under threat. Soon I will be taking to Cabinet a strategic plan for the industry which will also propose a review of the regulatory framework, and various funding initiatives are in place to help maintain the viability of an industry that is a bit shaky at the moment.

The Youth Justice Construction program will also lead to a number of positions. In Stage 1 at Wacol, in the new centre, we would anticipate 230 positions over the construction period. At Cleveland we anticipate approximately 87 positions to be created in the Townsville area over the two years.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** What impact is the GST expected to have on the clients of your department?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the member for the question. The impact of the GST could be quite significant. I am happy to outline my concerns about it to the Committee. The GST, as you know, has been touted by the

Commonwealth Government as the simple tax. As predicted by many people at the time, the devil is in the detail and the impact on the operations of the community sector are yet to be fully realised.

Most welfare service provision agencies will be categorised as GST free. What that means is that organisations providing GST-free services are not obliged to charge a goods and services tax on any fees that they may levy. Child care is a good example of that. Child-care providers do not have to charge a goods and services tax to parents using the facilities. However, they will be required to actually pay the GST on goods and services that they purchase. So again, the child-care centre will accrue GST on fuel, office rent, food for children, toys, etc. If they are providing a GST-free service, they will be able to claim back the GST that they have paid, usually at the end of the quarter.

While there may be on the face of it no net financial difference, there will be significant additional administrative and financial timing costs in paying and recording the GST up front and then claiming it back later. I think it is important to understand that many of the organisations I fund are very small organisations. Their management committees are actually volunteer management committees. In my view, this may constitute a very significant impost on a number of them.

A major issue, though, for the department is the advice we have received from the Australian Taxation Office, which has been confirmed by Queensland Treasury. Grants paid by my department will themselves be subject to the GST. That is, recipient organisations will be liable to pay a 10% tax on the grant they have received. While the Federal legislation has excluded from the GST grants paid as gifts, any grant that has conditions attached to it will accrue a GST. Obviously, every Government grant has conditions and therefore will attract a 10% tax.

We are in the process of negotiating with Treasury and the Australian tax office, but it would appear at this stage that what we will be forced to do is add 10% to the grant that we make to an organisation, which will then have to pay one-eleventh of the grant to the Australian tax office. The department will then have to seek to recoup from the tax office that 10% on every grant that we pay. So much, I would say, for the simple tax. If this is simplification, then I am glad they did not try to make it more complicated.

This, I think, has significant implications for any Government department that is making grants into the non-Government sector. My department is not alone in this problem. The Federal Government made its grants to the States GST free but did not see fit to make grants from the States to GST-free organisations GST free. So there will be significant administrative charges. It is shaping up, I think, to be a boon for accountants.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to the Output Statement on page 19, specifically the reference to the grants administration costs for community grants. What initiatives will drive the reduction in these costs?

**Ms BLIGH:** I thank the honourable member for the question. When I came into this portfolio I was surprised at the number of funding programs we administer, the way they are administered and the size of the programs that warranted a separate administration program. I would say that the system I inherited made Yes, Minister look efficient, and we are in the business of trying to fix it.

In my department at the present time we have 48 different funding programs ranging in size from \$110m, which is the Disability Program, to \$62,000, which is a program for child health and safety in the Office of Child Care. Organisations receiving funds from these programs have a separate service agreement for every one of them. Moreover, the service agreements are based on the funding program that the money has come from, not on the actual services being provided.

For example, an organisation seeking to provide a range of services to young women might need to go to a domestic violence program for some funds, to one of many youth programs to seek additional funds and to the Community and Individual Support Program for further funds—and that is only within my own department. They may have similar problems in other Government departments. So it is no surprise that some organisations just cannot see the point of signing service agreements. For organisations they do not add value; they just add red tape.

Also, each service agreement has a separate set of payments going to services and funding accountability coming to the department. Each service agreement has to be renewed every year. Despite this process being based on sound financial management principles, it has been unable so far to document the outcomes that are actually achieved by Government for the funding provided.

I can now say that the department is well placed to replace this outdated system and allow people to focus on providing services and to minimise the red tape they experience. Firstly, we will effectively be replacing the entire myriad of 48 funding programs with one funding program. We are also fixing the problem of multiple service agreements through the whole-of-Government Community Services Strategy, in which my department will be playing its part, and introducing a single standard service agreement. That agreement will then be for three years so that people are not having to reapply for funds every year. Attached to the single agreement will be a series of service plans that reflect the actual services an organisation provides, not the bureaucratic source of the funding. We will also be seeking information about the performance of services and, as such, we will be seeking to introduce a system of performance reporting, which includes information about outcomes where possible and appropriate, and the work that funded organisations are carrying out.

It will take us some time to put all of this in place, but I think it will make a significant difference. Many organisations have said to me, "Yes, there are inefficiencies in our sector, but most of them are caused by the requirements of Government", and we have an obligation, I think, to make our processes as simple as possible so that these organisations can get on with the business of providing services to their clients and to do it in a way that is as cost-effective as possible.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, in the MPS at page 10, note 4, I notice a reference there to: "In 1998-99 the Department also received unanticipated revenue from services and assets below fair value." What revenue was that, and what were the assets, Minister?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think it is probably best in this instance for me to refer you to the Acting Director of Service Strategy.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** It is mainly to do with services received from other Government departments. For example, we get the Department of Police to do some work in terms of ensuring that child-care workers and child protection workers do not have criminal histories. So it is mostly to do with the work that the police do, which they do for no cost. But we need, through an accrual accounting process, to count that cost as an asset received at below fair value.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I understand that is a service, but where does the asset come in? I

understand what you are saying there about a service being provided, but where is the asset? It says "services and assets".

**Mr O'BRIEN:** The assets are to do with the fit-out work that is undertaken by Project Services on our behalf, which is not part of our expenditure budget. So Project Services hold an allocation for fit-out of office accommodation, which they do on a project basis through a year, which is not part of our budget, but we have to count it as our asset because it is our office.

**Mr BEANLAND:** If you say so.

**Ms BLIGH:** Welcome to accrual accounting!

**Mr BEANLAND:** I did not think it was anything to do with accrual accounting—far from it. I do not believe that for a moment. In fact, we have not heard that word mentioned. It is to do with Public Works or Project Services.

**Ms BLIGH:** I am happy to explain that. Basically, the money that is held by Public Works for office fit-out is not part of our budget. The service is provided, they fit out the office, and it then is our asset. So under accrual terms, it has to be recorded.

**Mr BEANLAND:** All right. But the fact is that it is your money.

**Mr O'BRIEN:** In 1999-2000, it is our money; they are transferring those budgets to us. But in previous years, Project Services has held the budget.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, I refer to the MPS on page 24. I am inquiring how you could be so accurate with the Estimates for the percentage of indigenous youth in detention centres right down to the decimal point of a percentage: 56.8%—right on target in relation to this. Do you see it there, the second item under "Quantity": "% of youth detention centre population of Indigenous background"? The target for 1998-99 was 56.8%. The Actual for 1998-99 is 56.8%—spot-on. Minister, how can that be so?

**Ms BLIGH:** The member would be aware that this is the first year that Government departments have been required to report in the MPS on an output-based model and the first time that this material has actually been collected in this way. What it has required of the department is to actually sit down and work out what are the output measures that we are seeking to measure so that we can tell whether we have achieved what we are seeking to achieve by the programs we have put in place. I would be the first to say that that

is not an accurate business, and we may find that, over the process of output budgeting in the next two or three years, those figures will have to be revised or, in fact, other output measures found; because measuring human services is never an easy business.

There was no Estimate in 1998-99. It was a requirement of Treasury that that had to be put in there. So 56.8% is, in fact, the number at the date that the measure was taken for the purpose of recording in the MPS. What we are saying there is that we are seeking to have a 1.3% decrease. We would hope to actually achieve and better that target.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I understand that. But the point is that the Estimate is not an Estimate at all.

**Ms BLIGH:** It is the Actual.

**Mr BEANLAND:** The Actual figure you put in—whichever day and whoever did it. I presume, Minister, that the same applies for the next point. You are having a little cook of the books again. I think this refers to the number of admissions to community-based orders, where you get 3,666. Of course, that was the target in 1998-99. Again, the Actual for 1998-99 was the same figure: 3,666. And the next set of figures is the same again.

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. This is an entirely new system. It is bound to have a few teething problems. The figures recorded in the first column are Actuals, not Estimates, because there was, in fact, no Estimate last year. The meaningful data here is the last column, and the movement between the second and the third column. It is inevitable that, when you are moving to a new system of accounting and measuring, you will have these sorts of issues in the first year. This is something that you will not see in the next MPS, because we now have the Estimate for 1999-2000, and that is what will be recorded.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Only if you have not estimated it before; you are quite right.

**Ms BLIGH:** We were not required to estimate it before. I will ask the director-general to answer that question in terms of how output-based budgeting has been put forward by Treasury.

**Mr SMITH:** Clearly, they are the same, because if the target had been set after we knew what the Actual was, it would have also been a nonsense. If we knew, when we set the target for this publication, that the Actual was 3,666 and set the target at 3,800, it would have been a nonsense target. So by establishing that, in this first year, there are

clearly targets set for 1999-2000, that will be the base upon which judgment can then be made in future years. But this is the first year of outcome-based budgeting, and I am sure you would agree it would have been an absolute nonsense, when we knew the figure was the fact, to actually make up an Estimate just to create a difference.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You could have left it out.

**Mr SMITH:** I mean, there is some standardisation in Government that we are required to meet.

**Ms BLIGH:** We have never measured this before.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Minister, on the same page, page 24, how do you explain that you met a target of 15% compliance with approved standards for children in secure care and that you are only funding to meet 50% in the current financial year? What additional funds have you allocated for this? It comes under that section of "Quality".

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, that is a quality measure. It does not link with funding in that sense. It is a measure of the number of children who have Securing the Care plans in place in accordance with the standards. Now, I would have thought that the member for Indooroopilly would have recalled the Securing the Care project, because it actually began when the coalition was in Government. It relates to a new system of case planning and management for young people in our care. So at the time it was brought in—very late in the financial year that is being reported on here—it is a comprehensive change in the way that we case manage in our detention centres. Again, we would hope to exceed the 50% target, but it is a case-by-case management process, so it takes some time to implement. Tomorrow we could have five new young people come into the centre. Because they cannot have management plans in place straight away it takes some time to put them in place. So you will never have 100% unless you had no new admissions.

**Mr BEANLAND:** What additional funds have you allocated for this?

**Ms BLIGH:** It does not require extra funding; it is about doing the work that we do differently and doing the work that we do better. This Securing the Care plan is just a name for a new management system of putting in place case management for each child in a detention centre. Those youth workers who are already working in a facility will be working with the professionals that we employ on a case by case basis, or on a

regular basis, such as psychiatrists, psychologists and people involved with vocational education and training, etc. Those people will all sit down and work through a Securing the Care plan for a young person. This will determine their progress through the detention system. When it is in place, it will be the basis of that young person's experience in the system. It does not require extra funding. It is a matter of how we manage the children and how we use the resources we have.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I accept that, but I would have thought that in that case we would have got to 100% instead of 15% to 50%.

**Ms BLIGH:** We may get significantly higher than 50, but I go back to what I was saying: it is unlikely that, unless you have not had any admissions in a month—which is probably pretty well unheard of in our detention centres—you would never have 100%.

**Mr BEANLAND:** That is why I raised the issue of additional money to do this, but there is none. I get the story.

**Ms BLIGH:** Do you get it?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Yes, I do. There is no additional funding for it.

**Ms BLIGH:** It is not required.

**Mr SMITH:** Could I clarify the situation? The issue is that every child in a detention centre has a case plan. Securing the Care is a comprehensive system of case planning which is to be implemented over time and, given that it has been implemented within existing resources, it is being implemented realistically. But it will mean comprehensive planning between a range of agencies to ensure that young people's needs do not fall through the cracks.

**Ms BLIGH:** No matter how much money you put into it, you could not at any time say that you had 100% unless you had no admissions for a period of time.

**Mr BEANLAND:** But you could get closer to it.

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, certainly. What we have tried to do in setting our performance targets is set targets that we realistically believe we can meet. In many areas we hope to exceed them.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Could I move on to the Moving Ahead program. I refer to page 12 of the MPS and the output statement on page 14. In the output statement you have shown a figure of some \$16.8m on both estimates and actual expenditure for the last financial year.

The Estimate for the current financial year is again \$16m. You indicate on page 12 that the majority of people in that program require ongoing assistance. Presumably, others will be added to the scheme. Last financial year, how many people were in the scheme and how many do you expect to be in the scheme this financial year?

**Ms BLIGH:** Let me get the numbers for you of the people who are actually in the scheme. We are in the process of allocating places for this year. It is in the vicinity of 500 young people who are in the scheme at the moment. I will get the correct figure for you in a moment. There will be approximately 160 young people in the scheme in future years.

The program is one with which I assume you are familiar because it was put in place as a short-term political stop-gap by your Government when it was unable to make any long-term commitment to disability funding, and when it found itself with a difficulty in the Anti-Discrimination Commission from a family who had taken the Government to task over the fact that their young child, who had a disability, had to leave school with no resources. The Government of the day—a Government of which you were a part—put in place what is called the Moving Ahead program where young people were put on the program with a two-year deadline. They were told, "Here is something for two years and then you fall off the cliff." You knew that the two-year deadline would conveniently fall after the next election. Presumably, it meant you had no intention of winning the next election, for which I am very grateful.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I would not say that at all—far from it, in fact.

**Ms BLIGH:** You would have inherited the same political problem that I inherited, and that was nearly 500 young people who had been getting a service for two years and for which there was no budget planning. There are 511 young people who are currently receiving funding under the program.

The program was evaluated and it was found to be a good example of a flexible program and many people are accessing services in very different ways. It was supposed to be a transition program where young people would go through two years of transition from the school environment into, supposedly, a work environment. But, of course, the young people on this program, for the most part, are young people who, because of the very nature of their disabilities, are unlikely to ever enter the paid work force or to

be able to transition to something like a TAFE college.

The evaluation found that about 20% of the young people on the program would be able to make that transition into Commonwealth employment programs. As a result of that, there would be some vacancies in the program. We anticipate that the program will continue to operate on that basis, in the sense that at the end of two years there will be some assessment and those people who are able to move into a Commonwealth employment program would do so. However, the people who were not able to do that—that is, those young people with the most high support needs and whose disabilities would disadvantage them the most—would be given certainty forever under our Government. We are not going to kick them out after two years. We are not going to leave their families in the lurch. It does not mean that some member of the family will have to stop working in order to support them full-time. It does not mean that people have to stop being breadwinners, and all the other things that you left us with. We think we have found a pretty good solution.

**Mr BEANLAND:** We picked up the things that you left behind, Minister. The Minister seems to forget that these things keep going around. I refer to page 9 of the MPS. How would you characterise world's best practice in relation to child protection services when 30% of children in the care of your department have had multiple placements in 1998-99 and you have only proposed a 5% improvement in the current financial year?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am just looking at the table on page 9. You are looking at the percentage of children who have had only one placement in the last 12 months?

**Mr BEANLAND:** Yes.

**Ms BLIGH:** We are trying to be accurate in our measurement. The actual figure for 1997-98 was 68.3%. It is considered adequate practice, not world's best practice. Our real concern is not so much with the 70% of children who are not having more than one placement. At the other end of the spectrum we have about 10% of children who have more than three placements within 12 months. A much smaller percentage has even more in 12 months. These are the children who are at significant risk of long-term damage as a result of constant placement turnover.

There is nothing in that table that does not confirm the material that is already on the public record and which was established by the commission of inquiry into child protection in

this State. As I said, it took us nearly a century to get to this position. It is going to take us a while to find our way out of it. The resources that we have put into the budget this year—some of which I have already outlined—will go to putting in some greater support around the children who are at risk of placement turnover, and around the foster families who take on the task of rearing those children.

We anticipate that it will have an effect over time, but it will not happen overnight. There are only eight months left of this financial year. We are trying to be realistic about the rate and pace of change. We are talking about some very complex case matters. You cannot buy a fix to that. You have to work very carefully to put the child with the right foster family and find support from the community that can support that whole unit if we are going to have any chance of reducing placement turnover.

**Mr BEANLAND:** The reason why I raised this question is because of the Forde inquiry recommendations. I regularly hear you talk about world's best practice—

**Ms BLIGH:** That is what we are aiming for.

**Mr BEANLAND:** You continually raise it. You talk about implementing the Forde inquiry recommendations. I suggest to you that moving from 70 to 75%—an increase of only 5% in this financial year—is totally inadequate if you are moving towards meeting those recommendations.

**Ms BLIGH:** Again, it may be a target that we will exceed. This is a target that we have set ourselves and we are very hopeful about meeting our targets in many areas and exceeding them. Again, this is the first time—and I will say again—that the department has reported in this way. It is difficult to estimate in advance, having never done this in advance, what the change may be, but if you look at the rate of change between 1997-98 and our actual in 1998-99, as I said, in 1997-98, it was 68.3 so we have had an increase in that financial year, but that was without extra resources. So with the extra resources that we are putting in, we believe that we will double the rate of improvement and at that kind of rate, we will have an exponential improvement that will certainly make a difference.

I have to say that, until now—and certainly under your Government—there was never any publication of any targets. Nobody ever set a target for themselves. I think that everybody knows that if you are trying to

actually improve anything, to set a target and to set a goal is one of the first things that do you. That is what we have done, but it is a realistic target. For the 5% of children who we are able to achieve it for, it will make a real difference to their lives.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer again to page 9 of the MPS. In your output statement for services for children and young people you have a series of criteria purportedly to indicate quality. One of them is the increased proportion of young people in designated target groups accessing services. How does mere contact with a service indicate the quality of that service or anything else? Why do you not look for behavioural and developmental changes to reflect the quality of services funded by your department?

**Ms BLIGH:** That quality measure is actually in relation to the services funded under the youth program. It is accessed by a very, very broad cross-section of young people ranging from the Duke of Edinburgh Awards to youth development programs and youth service coordinators in schools. This is one of those areas where it is a difficult thing to determine what is an appropriate measure of the quality of the work that we do. It may be that a young person might come into the youth service in Dalby only once, but having accessed it, they might have a piece of information that makes a very big difference in their lives. That is not something that we can actually test. These are not young people in the care of the department; these are young people who we do not necessarily ever have contact with again.

We are trying to measure access to our services and making sure that our services are accessible by the broadest possible range of young people, which is why we are trying to ensure that the services that we fund to provide the services to youth are being accessed by young people from a range of target groups. Again, this might be one that we can refine over time as we get more experienced and practised at the art of measuring the outcomes of human service delivery.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. I call the member for Mundingburra.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** I refer to the last paragraph on page 18 of the MPS and the transfer of victims of crime community grant funding of \$6.3m to the Department of Families, Youth and Community Care. Minister, can you explain to this Committee

why the transfer has occurred? What are the anticipated benefits?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, thank you. The department is very pleased to have the opportunity to work further with this group of people in our community. I am very pleased to take the question. You would be aware that my ministerial colleague the Honourable the Attorney-General has already responded to some questions from a previous Estimates Committee.

From the outset, I want to put on the public record and assure the Committee that there has been no decrease in funding for victims of crime organisations. In fact, when Labor came into Government, we allocated an extra \$1m to victims of crime organisations to support people who had experienced crimes. Under the former coalition Government—in fact, under the leadership of the member for Indooroopilly—in the 1997-98 Budget, \$1m was allocated to victims of crime but only \$474,000 of it was actually spent. In the past year, however—

**Mr BEANLAND:** You did not think of it until I started it.

**Ms BLIGH:** In the past year, Labor has allocated \$1.06m. Touchy, are they not?

**Mr BEANLAND:** No, I am just answering. You asked me—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order! The member for Indooroopilly!

**Ms BLIGH:** As I think that I have outlined comprehensively this evening, my department has a number of funding programs but we also have considerable expertise in administering funds to the non-Government sector. It is an area that requires experience and expertise and we are continuing to improve this through our reform strategy.

Through the domestic violence court support initiative, the department already distributes funds to victims support groups and people who are supporting people who have gone through that experience. The transfer is really an administrative transfer; it does not move the responsibility for the criminal justice system and the interest that victims have in it to my department. All it is is a transfer across Government of administrative responsibility for administering these funds. I am very confident that, with the new funding initiatives that we are putting forward, such as three-year triennial funding and such as single service agreements, that, in fact, the organisations that receive funds through this allocation of funds will see a significant improvement in the

cutting in red tape to what they are currently experiencing.

The transfer has also been supported by a number of victims groups, such as the Queensland Homicide Victims Support Group, which actually sought this transfer in a letter to the Attorney-General; the organisation Protect All Children Today, which does court support work with children; and Citizens Against Road Slaughter. I have also recently had indications from Project Micah, which provides support to victims of institutional abuse and which receives funds under this allocation, that they support the transfer. So we look forward to working with these groups. Many of them are already providing services to clients of our department.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, can you outline the benefits of the Rural Outreach Service referred to on page 8 of your MPS?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, thank you. It is an exciting initiative. It is another example of the Government's commitment to regional Queensland, specifically in child care, and to improving the information technology infrastructure in the State. It is part of implementing an election commitment that was contained in the Rural Queensland New Directions statement when we came into Government and under the auspices of Queensland Online.

In August, I approved the disbursement of \$322,200 in non-recurrent funds for 82 children's services in rural and remote Queensland to be linked. Seventy-nine of the services will receive funding to purchase computer hardware and software—most of them for the first time. Three services, which already have compatible computer hardware, will be funded to assist with an Internet service provider and telephone costs. That will provide for these 82 services for the first time ever to be computer linked.

The services have been funded to purchase their own equipment so that the money stays in their local community and so that they can receive appropriate after-sales support. Through this link-up, the services will be able to access information about each other, the work that they are doing and some of the initiatives that they might be providing to children. It is also a direct link to the Office of Child Care in my department, which will moderate a bulletin board of information. There will be a 24-hour turnaround on the information that is posted on the board, which will include information about grants that might

be available, programs that can be put in place, curriculum and training programs.

We anticipate that the whole network will be up and running by December this year. I am confident that this initiative will mean better child-care services for parents, particularly in regional and remote Queensland, and will provide those families using those services as well as those staff, who are often in very remote areas and who are very isolated from professional support and professional development, with the capacity to link with their colleagues in other towns that might be quite a long way away. It is a bit of an experiment, but I think that it is an exciting initiative in remote and regional Queensland. As I said, I look forward to reporting on how it goes and how it improves the working capacity of those services.

**Mr FENLON:** Minister, in your answer to the question on notice in relation to the International Year of Older Persons, you referred to an intergenerational ad campaign to promote positive awareness around issues of ageing. Would you please outline the costs associated with this campaign, its goals, and how it compares to similar advertising campaigns?

**Ms BLIGH:** Yes, thank you. A major goal of the Beattie Government has been to break down barriers between the generations as part of our contribution to the International Year of Older Persons. That is why we launched the multimedia campaign. It has the goals of challenging community stereotypes of both seniors in our community and young people. It tries to achieve a positive attitudinal change and to look for a behavioural change in the way in which people approach each other.

The advertising is aimed at the whole community, but particularly seniors and young people. The total budget for the campaign is \$200,000. The costs involve \$85,000 for TV media, \$48,000 for TV production, \$37,000 for transit media, \$15,000 for transit production, \$7,000 for photography and \$2,700 for bills, posters, media and production. As I said, it comes to a total of about \$200,000. So far, we had have a very positive response to the campaign. The theme of the campaign is respect. It tries to promote respect between older and younger people as well as perhaps trying to find those experiences in life that they have in common, despite their vastly different ages.

This is a very modest but very successful campaign with a message for all of us that respect is ageless. It stands in sharp contrast

to the work of the previous Government, which spent more than \$300,000 doing exactly the opposite. The campaigns that were run against young people to demonise them all as potential offenders did nothing more than break down respect between older and younger people. The juvenile offender media campaign operated by the member for Indooroopilly when he was Attorney-General accrued the odium that it deserved. Despite the fact that he spent \$305,000 on it, it could be argued that no positive gain was made for any member of the community.

I am very proud of our campaign. I look forward to seeing very soon the positive promotion on city council buses of young people as valuable of members of our community and seniors as just as valuable. That will make a nice change to some of the things that used to be there.

**Mr FENLON:** Given the Government's support for recommendations made by the Forde inquiry in relation to ongoing counselling and support services for former residents abused in Queensland institutions, can you outline what initiatives have been put in place to reflect the Government's support?

**Ms BLIGH:** I think it is fair to say that the recommendations of the Forde inquiry really fell squarely into two camps. The bulk of the recommendations go primarily to the question of improving our system in the future so that some of the practices and problems uncovered by Mrs Forde's inquiry would indeed stay a thing of the past and would not be repeated, and that some of the gaps in our current service provision could be filled.

The other set of recommendations went primarily to the question of addressing the pain of the past and to recognising the pain that was still being experienced as a result of the past experiences of so many members of our community. The inquiry took submissions from over 300 people, and that is just the tip of the iceberg in many respects. However, those 300 individuals are part of the Queensland community. They are part of our workplaces, our school communities and our neighbourhoods. Many of them are battling the odds to build their lives.

We have addressed a number of those recommendations. Firstly, as members would know, the Government has issued, with the relevant church leaders, a joint apology to former residents. As I announced to the Parliament, a copy of this apology is on display in the foyer. It is also on public display in the foyer of my ministerial office and the office of

the director-general of the department. We took the decision that it was important, as a symbolic gesture, that the department be seen publicly to be embracing the sentiment of the apology.

We have also established a counselling and support service. As I outlined earlier, this is currently being funded by funds made available through the budget savings of the Forde inquiry. The funding will be sourced through the new initiative in the next year. The service is being auspiced by Relationships Australia, which has significant experience in counselling and family matters. As I said, the service opened this week. It is located in West End, but it will provide services to people from across the State. We will be able to do both telephone counselling and link people with counsellors in their own towns. We have some funds to do that.

We have also announced the formation of a \$1m trust fund to fund the identified needs of former residents. We are currently in the process of getting legal advice on the form of the trust deed. We are negotiating with the Public Trustee around the appropriate involvement of the Office of the Public Trust in the development of the trust fund. Once the trust is up and running, it will be completely independent of Government and managed by a board of trustees, as trusts are, so it is important that we get it right. I look forward to announcing that in the early part of the new year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer to page 21 of your MPS, and I ask: what early intervention initiatives have you put in place to reduce the incarceration of young people and their recidivist activity?

**Ms BLIGH:** A number of initiatives have all been very innovative and some are showing early promise. We made an election commitment to establish three youth justice services. They will be in Townsville, Ipswich and Logan. Those services will work intensively with young people who are on non-detention court orders. They will work at that very early stage of offending to turn the lives of those young people around. This is the first time that we have really put significant intensive resources into working on a very one-to-one basis with those young people. The services are actually located in the communities to assist the necessary links with the community. This will ensure that, for example, when courts make community service orders, there is useful, meaningful and valuable work for the young offender to carry out in the community.

The Townsville service began on 23 August. The Ipswich service commenced operation last week. The Logan service is currently starting to function in some temporary premises and we are having discussions with the Logan City Council about finding permanent premises for them.

We have made a commitment in this budget to making the four community conferencing pilots a permanent feature of our juvenile justice system. As I have outlined earlier, we have funded, at a significant level, the new Youth at Risk project in far-north Queensland. We have also met our election commitment to put in place youth crime prevention grants that are basically accessible by community organisations. Again, this is about finding local solutions to local problems. I think that some of those bear some examination and I would like to share them with you.

The people of Aurukun secured a grant of \$10,000 for a project called the Wik Manhood project. This project allows young men from the community to spend time with elders on traditional lands, undertaking training to do with manhood issues. I am advised that there has been a substantial drop in the number of young people appearing in court since the program was started. Indeed, since the implementation of the project, no young person has been sentenced to detention. As the member for Mundingburra may know, for a long time the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre has housed a significant number of young people from the Aurukun community. I think that the strength of that project indicates what can be done when people put their minds to it and think creatively and when Governments are flexible enough to allow communities to come up with different solutions.

Similar projects are occurring across the State. For example, in Charleville a project operating across the Balonne Shire has received a grant of \$30,000. That project is focusing on young people who, at this stage, are minor offenders. It involves various departments in delivering life skills and works with the police, who are undertaking camping and mentoring activities with young people. We are utilising resources and expertise, both across the community and across Government departments. We are very confident that this program will continue to see those kinds of results.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, I refer you to page 26 of your MPS and ask: in relation to the electricity concession scheme, is this

program operational and, if so, how many individuals have received a concession to date?

**Ms BLIGH:** I am pleased to report to the Committee that to date over 1,200 payments have been made to individuals under this concession scheme. The concession scheme is aimed at assisting seriously ill people who use home-based life support systems such as oxygen concentrators and kidney dialysis machines that are supplied through Queensland Health. Obviously, the electricity bills for people can be beyond their means in some circumstances.

Up to \$48 per quarter per machine for users of oxygen concentrators is available and a concession of up to \$32.25 per quarter per machine is available for users of kidney dialysis machines. The concession is retrospective and payable from 1 July 1998. It is estimated that approximately 2,000 Queenslanders would be eligible and will be assisted by this scheme. It is fully operational and we started to make initial payments on 14 September. As I have said, 1,200 people have received payments thus far, and I am sure that it is only a matter of time before we see more people applying.

**Ms NELSON-CARR:** Minister, can you outline the initiatives in your MPS that will assist the child-care sector?

**Ms BLIGH:** As I said earlier, the child-care sector is experiencing a number of impacts that are threatening the viability of many operators and many organisations. Most predominantly, the cuts by the Commonwealth Government over the last couple of Budgets, not only cuts to the operational subsidy but also the freezing of family allowances at about 1996 levels, have had an impact. We have seen centres closing and an increase in informal care. The Commonwealth Government has announced that it will be removing the current cap on the number of subsidised places in Queensland. I should explain what the cap is. The cap is a planning mechanism put in place by the Commonwealth to try to ensure that we do not have centres starting up in places where there is really not a need or there is an existing oversupply.

It is really the only planning tool that is available to Government for the industry. The Federal Minister, Jocelyn Newman, has indicated that there has been a cap on there for nearly three years. I think it will be removed in January this year. I have written to the Federal Minister. In Queensland, we have a number of areas where the viability of centres

is being threatened by previous lack of planning and oversupply. Without operational subsidies and without access to reasonable levels of rebates to meet the rising costs, families are no longer able to use the services, and centres are increasingly facing, as I said, possible closure. The removal of that planning mechanism is something that we need to be very concerned about.

This industry is a very significant industry in Queensland. I do not know that people realise that almost 30,000 people are employed in the child-care sector, including long day care, family day care, vacation care and out of school care services. The Government has tried to recognise the difficulty that has been experienced by this industry. We have established a child-care forum, which is made up of community and industry representatives, to develop a five-year plan that will focus on the needs of the industry, and it is being developed in conjunction with industry. We have made a commitment to change the regulatory framework that guides the work of the industry. We will establish regulated standards for backyard care. It will allow services to respond more flexibly to the needs of parents and children and will facilitate the development of a much more sustainable child-care industry, and I look forward to making an announcement about that strategy very soon.

The Child Care Infrastructure Program was an election commitment and initiative of our Government to try to alleviate some of the financial pressures that are on services. We cannot replace the operational subsidy that has been ripped out by the Feds, but we can try to relieve some budget pressures. Allowing organisations to access funds for toys, equipment, white goods, major capital works or building requirements relieves some of the pressure on their budgets so that money that they might have otherwise had to set aside for those things can be put into some of the operational issues that might keep fees down and make it more affordable for parents.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I refer to answer to question on notice No. 3, which asked for details about consultancies. There is an amount listed for PricewaterhouseCoopers of \$121,300. I would like the details of that. I did ask for the details, but you are obviously short of ink over there; we did not get the details.

**Ms BLIGH:** Significant detail has been provided to both the member for Indooroopilly and the member for Burleigh on two separate occasions. What I did was provide the update—

**Mr BEANLAND:** Not for this one. You have not given me the detail for the amount of \$121,000 before?

**Ms BLIGH:** That is right. These consultancies are all subject to data that has already been provided to you, but these represent further funds in that consultancy. You asked questions about consultancies in relation to PricewaterhouseCoopers. I am just trying to locate that in your questions on notice.

**Mr BEANLAND:** It is No. 3.

**Ms BLIGH:** No, I am looking for the questions on notice that you asked some time ago about consultancies so that I can give you the details.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I will look that up. I have that one here.

**Ms BLIGH:** The purpose of the PricewaterhouseCoopers consultancy is to manage the implementation of the new SAP/R3HR payroll system using both departmental and external resources. These are further funds that have been expended on that consultancy since you first asked about it. All of the information and material that you sought in relation to whether it was tendered, whether there would be a report and so on was all contained in the answer to your question on notice some time ago.

**Mr BEANLAND:** Page 18 of the MPS refers to the Gambling Help-Line. You indicate that consideration will be given to extending the Gambling Help-Line following the independent analysis. However, in answer to question on notice No. 4 you indicated that funding will be maintained at current levels. Which of the statements is correct? Are we going to have an extension of the Gambling Help-Line? Is there additional funding for that to occur? What is the situation? The answers appear to conflict.

**Ms BLIGH:** I do not think they do. The answer to the question on notice indicated that there was no intention to cut the program. The existing levels will be maintained. Should the evaluation establish that this program is worth extending in its current form, we would seek through further budget allocations to extend the Gambling Help-Line. The independent evaluation has been finalised, but it is currently with the responsible gambling advisory committee, which is a committee that advises me as Minister on a range of issues to do with gambling revenue. I have yet to receive the evaluation report so I am unable to comment at this stage on the shape or the nature of it and what it says. I look forward to receiving

that very soon. There is no specific budget allocation in this budget to expand that program, but it is there in the MPS to allude to the fact that we are keen to make sure that the services are available to as many Queenslanders as possible.

**Mr BEANLAND:** A number of pages in the MPS refer to child-care services. Is there any additional funding in the budget in relation to dealing with unregulated backyard child-care operators? That is something I am getting continual letters and requests about. I continually write to you about this. I am sure you are getting widespread representation about this matter. I appreciate that some more work is being done on regulations. If you are going to do something in relation to it, it will need inspectors and so forth. Is there any additional funding in the Budget to cope with this matter? It looks like you have got plenty of paper; you should be able to answer it fully.

**Ms BLIGH:** I have got an answer—without the paper. The question of regulating backyard care is in the first instance a legislative question and not a financial question. Ultimately depending on the legislative proposals that are finalised and supported by the Parliament, we will then be in a position to make determinations about possible costs incurred, although I would also say that we are also looking as part of the Child Care Strategic Plan at the priorities for the Office of Child Care and the way we do our work in both the Office of Child Care and out in regions, where child-care resource officers are working with child-care centres, and the priorities that we set for their work. As the member alluded, the regulation of backyard care is quite a contentious issue and it is one about which the industry is concerned from the point of view of its possible threats to its viability. It is one about which the Government is concerned, because of the risk to children in terms of standards.

The question of how we regulate backyard care is not easily answered and there have been extensive discussions with the industry itself about how that might occur. We have been having discussions with the Commonwealth Government about this. One of the reasons for the proliferation of backyard care is that it is eligible for the Child Care Rebate. The only requirement for a family to access the Child Care Rebate is that they get care from a care provider who has a tax number and has registered with the Medicare office. A number of families can reasonably be excused for believing that, when the Commonwealth Government is giving them a

rebate for a service—and many families have reported that they did believe this—these services had been checked or that the person had a licence or was somehow registered; that registering with the Commonwealth Government required some sort of process of checking. That is not the case at the moment in Queensland, but I understand that in other States, where the State Government has put in place some regulatory standards the Commonwealth would participate by providing the Child Care Rebate only to those people who meet those standards. Part of the stick in the equation is that families who are using backyard care which was not meeting the regulations would not be eligible for the Child Care Rebate. That is part of the policing of the new system.

**Mr BEANLAND:** I thank you, Minister, and your departmental staff.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Finally, I note on page 1 of the MPS that reference is made to efforts in respect of organisational development to improve service capabilities in the department. Can you briefly outline the details of this process?

**Ms BLIGH:** Near the end of last year the department started to go through a strategic planning exercise. Our strategic plan signals a new direction for the department. As part of that and as triggered also by the decision to create the new Disability Services Agency, the department has gone through a two-phased organisational development process. Phase 1 focused on program structure in head office and some of the issues that I have already alluded to, such as centralising our funding function and refining the program areas and making them more integrated with each other. We are looking at a Statewide service area that will look at services that are provided on a Statewide basis. The second phase of the organisational development process has been looking at aligning our resources at a regional level and working on a much stronger partnership with our local government partners. The department will be moving from a structure which has five regions to a structure with 12 regions and will be starting to work much more with people at the local level. The organisational development teams were made up of departmental staff.

I would like to take this opportunity to recognise the work that they have done in putting together these things. I recognise that this sort of change is never easy. Departmental officers across the department have embraced most of these changes with a great deal of excitement and optimism. I would

also like to recognise the vision and work of the director-general in this regard. He has apparently become known on the front line as Gandhi in a suit. He asked me not to say that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Fitzroy will be devastated.

**Ms BLIGH:** The member for Fitzroy might have copyright and I will have to take it up with him. Organisational development will put our department on a much stronger footing to achieve our strategic plan and to achieve the reforms that I have outlined to the Committee at some length this afternoon.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The time allotted for the consideration of the Estimates of expenditure for the Minister for Families, Youth and Community Care and Minister for Disability Services has now expired. I thank the Minister and all of the portfolio officers for their attendance and the efforts that they have put in for this hearing. That also concludes the consideration by Estimates Committee G of the matters referred to it by the Parliament on 27 August 1999. I declare this public hearing closed.

The Committee adjourned at 7.31 p.m.