

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE D**

Mr T. S. Mulherin (Chair)

Mr C. P. Cummins

Mr H. W. T. Hobbs

Mr R. G. Hopper

Mr G. E. Malone

Ms C. Molloy

Mrs C. E. Sullivan

**LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND PLANNING****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. J. I. Cunningham, Minister for Local Government and Planning

Dr E. Campbell, Director-General

Ms L. O'Neill, Manager, Finance

Mr M. Tucker, General Manager, Local Government Services

Mr A. Kuru, General Manager, Building Codes Queensland

<sup>001</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee D now open. I welcome the Minister for Local Government, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2001 for the areas as set out in the estimates committee process rules. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: Minister for Local Government and Planning, Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland, and Minister for Environment.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for a question is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A warning bell will be given 15 seconds prior to the expiration of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. The estimates committee process rules require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with Standing Order 195, the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. I ask that everyone present ensure that their mobile phones are turned off to prevent the disruption of committee proceedings.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Planning to be open for examination. The question before the Chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes. Thank you, Mr Chairman. The last financial year was a very busy one in my portfolio. A lot has changed and a lot has been

achieved. As you would be aware, the department has undergone some major changes. The former Department of Communication and Information, Local Government and Planning and Sport has become the Department of Local Government and Planning. A number of the former entities' functions, Sport and Recreation Queensland, Communication and Information, and Regional Communities, have been transferred to other agencies. This is a crucial fact to bear in mind when looking at this year's budget.

I would like to point out the dual reporting purpose of the budget figures presented in the department's MPS. One of these purposes is to allow annual comparisons of the department's function and the other is to reflect the departure impact on my department of the functions transferred to other departments. That is why the MPS reflects two sets of budget data.

Firstly, the individual output statements and the output operating statements relate solely to the functions that now reside with the Department of Local Government and Planning, and these statements allow a good comparison between the budget years of the functions specific to this department. Secondly, in terms of the 2000-01 financial year, the departmental financial statements include actual revenue and expenditure up to 28 February 2001 for those functions transferred after that date as a result of the changes to the department structure. In other words, 2000-01 figures include the costs incurred by Sport and Recreation Queensland, Communication and Information, and Regional Communities up to the time of their transfer to other agencies. Figures relating to the functions remaining with the Department of Local Government and Planning are also included but as a full year figure. I trust that this will assist you in reviewing the department's budget. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have during the course of today's proceedings and I will be ably assisted by officers from my department, including the Director-General, Dr Ted Campbell, in that regard.

As I said earlier, 2000-01 was a busy and rewarding period and this year's budget aims to keep that momentum going. In 2001-02 the department will have a total budget of \$201 million, including \$177 million for local government grants and subsidies, which leaves the department's operating budget of \$24 million. In addition, the department will administer a further \$284.4 million in grants and subsidies. Adjusting for costs associated with functions transferred out of the department and for additional funds provided last financial year for natural disaster relief, which are allocated to meet actual requirements, I am pleased to report that the department's 2001-02 budget will remain at the same level as the previous financial year's. This puts paid to the nonsense we have heard recently to the contrary and which we will probably hear more of today.

The 2001-02 budget will include additional funding for a number of projects. They are, firstly, the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The Queensland government has signed an intergovernmental agreement with the federal government and, as part of this commitment, has allocated more than \$1 million in state funds to the department over the next three years. The federal government will match this funding, allowing for the education and training of local governments and enabling them to play an active role in the implementation of that plan.

Secondly, \$1 million will be provided over the next two years for the implementation of the Integrated Planning Act reform. This funding will enable the completion of the consequential legislative program to capture all remaining state approval processes as soon as possible and the preparation of IPA planning

schemes by all Queensland local governments by the deadline of March 2003. Associated training and advisory programs will continue throughout the state to ensure that the IPA reform changes are understood and implemented officially.

Thirdly, over the next two years \$1 million will be made available to improve fire safety standards for existing high-risk buildings. Research and development will identify cost-effective ways of making these buildings safer. New building codes and guidelines will be prepared to assist owners of budget accommodation to comply with proposed new fire safety laws and to meet community expectations and contemporary fire safety standards.

In this year the department will continue to provide funding to local governments for infrastructure and services. While page 14 of the MPS may suggest to some a decline of \$12 million in the amount of funding allocated to councils through grants and subsidies, this is not the case. The estimated actual includes natural disaster relief funding of \$30 million that was provided as supplementation during that year. Disaster relief funds are revisited during the course of the financial year. Therefore, in real terms grant payments are actually expected to increase by \$10 million under this government this financial year.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. The member for Warrego?

**Mr HOBBS:** What is the total amount of funding provided by your department specifically to local government? What is the total funding provided across all state government portfolios and programs to local government?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I thank you very much for that question. I thought I had actually covered a lot of that just now, but I will ask the director-general to give you the finer details of those figures.

**Dr CAMPBELL:** The figures essentially provided to local government in funding are from two sources. One is Commonwealth Grants Commission funding, which last year I think was approximately \$246 million and this year is estimated to be between \$258 million and \$260 million. There is another approximately \$175 million that is provided in the form of grants under a number of programs, and on top of that there is Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements funding, which varies from year to year. Essentially, what the department does is to apply to Treasury when those funds are called on. But that amount varies considerably.

**Mr HOBBS:** I was really referring to the—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Is this another question?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, another question. What I am referring to is the total amount of funds that are provided by the government across all portfolios to local government. What I want to know is how much money is provided to local government in Queensland.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will take that on notice and we will get those figures to you. If you are wanting to know the exact figures there, then I will get those for you.

**Mr HOBBS:** I think that it is important. You are the Minister for Local Government and you should know what money is going to local governments across Queensland.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that what you are talking about is Treasury, not just this portfolio.

**Mr HOBBS:** This is across all portfolios to local government. The money is your responsibility.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will get those figures from Treasury for you.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, Minister. I note that in the budget you have allocated \$1 million over two years for the implementation of IPA and IDAS by March 2003. You would be aware that councils have made it very clear that they are preparing to cooperate to meet that target, but they have also made it clear that they will have great difficulty in doing so without additional funding to assist local governments in this preparation. How do you propose to assist local governments with the preparation of these plans?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** To get the IPA plans completed by March 2003?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** By March 2003?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I believe it is extremely important that those plans are completed by that date. I have had some requests for extensions of time. This has been a five-year program to get all those plans completed and to have every council in Queensland working with an IPA-compliant plan by March 2003. I think it is really important, because at the moment councils right throughout Queensland are working under all different types of plans. Some are very, very old; some are non-existent. Some councils that amalgamated in 1994 are still working in 2001 under two different and sometimes three different plans. It is not good for local government; it is not good for development. So I am very, very keen to have that deadline met.

?? The department is assisting broadly. We are providing a wide range of assistance to help those councils with that deadline. We are developing and implementing collaborative working arrangements with local governments and state agencies to facilitate that. Department officers meet with council staff and elected representatives, planning consultants and other stakeholder groups. I think the review of IPA that has been going on for some time is almost complete. The draft is ready now to go to stakeholders. During the debate on the LGOLA Bill I offered to give you a copy of that and to talk with you about it. The forums have been held. One pilot forum was held in Bundaberg recently between government agencies and councils to try to identify clearly what requirements there are to implement those plans. The amendments from the IPA review should be ready to go before parliament before Christmas. Therefore, the department is working very closely with councils to help them to get those plans in place. As I say, it is really important not just for councils but also for Queensland that all of our 125 councils are working closely and working to the one IPA-compliant process by that date.

**Mr HOBBS:** There is no money at all going to councils? This assistance will be purely departmental advice? There will not be financial assistance given to councils?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** To my knowledge, there has never been any intention of putting money to councils to do that. Certainly the work of the department in helping councils costs money in time and resources. We are probably indirectly helping those councils to get those plans in place. I do not believe that over the last three years that it has been going on there has ever been any intention to give councils actual dollars to proceed with it.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, you further state that the department will have a resource implication in providing whole-of-government input for this in relation to IPA. That is

referred to at page 2, dot point 4. How much is this resource implication and how do you intend to overcome that problem?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Can you tell me again where you are reading from?

**Mr HOBBS:** Page 2, dot point 4.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Statutory compliance under IPA?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes. You said there will be resource implications for the department. What are those resource implications?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The department has focused its resources and activities in the following ways, and I just touched on this. We have established a strategy group chaired by the general manager to oversee and coordinate the department's plan-making activities and to achieve consistency in the advice that is given. The group is supported by a technical working group of officers from the different regional and policy divisions. We have established within the department a dedicated team of planners with specialised skills and practical experience in plan making to research and prepare guidance about plan making and drafting under the IPA. We have established within the department a related team with specialist skills and experience in infrastructure planning and charging to research and prepare guidance about infrastructure planning and charging under the IPA. We have established peer reference groups with local government and consultant planning professionals to oversee and respond to departmental initiatives. We have established a reference group of state agency officers involved in plan making to clarify and refine the state interests in plan making. We have further encouraged day-to-day contact between the departments regional planning team and local governments involved in plan making and infrastructure activities.

The department will approach the task further by continuing the program of scheme guidance development and the development of example schemes. The pilot scheme that we have been working on for some time should be ready in about August to go out to different councils to help them. Of the ones that have not yet started, it will help those councils to get started. We provide detailed advice and examples for local governments to follow through structured, regionally based workshops. As I mentioned before, one was recently held in Bundaberg. We will look at the results of that and, if it is beneficial, we will hold those in other areas of the state where council officers and state agencies can meet and talk over what is actually required to put those plans together.

We will streamline state agency involvement. We are going to continue to maintain the ongoing statewide program of training workshops and seminars about plan making and further develop the department's comprehensive IPA web site, which contains key information. We will continue the existing policy of making IPA information produced by the department available from the web free of charge. I think that the department is working very hard and I am certainly committed to having all of the IPA plans completed by March 2003.

**Mr HOBBS:** What you are really saying is that the \$1 million that is already put in place for the IPA implementation is going to those things, so there is no other resource implications in relation to the implementation of the IPA?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Not to my knowledge. The \$1 million that is being provided is new funding that will go towards whatever we need to ensure that those plans are finished. Different needs come up along the way and the department will have that funding there to make sure that we can get that planning done.

We have heard a lot in recent months about high legal costs from councils. Of course, they are all blaming the IPA for that, but it results from the fact that Queensland's governments are not working under consistent planning at this stage. It is really imperative that we all put our best foot forward to get that completed. That \$1 million is there so that we can ensure that we have the funding to continue the planning.

**Mr HOBBS:** In relation to giving local government a better opportunity, would you support local governments having the tender exemption for road-making activities extended from \$100,000 to \$500,000 to assist them with the ongoing development of local government work forces? One of the problems that we have had for a while, and that has been talked about for some time, is that local governments are being pushed out of the tender stakes in some areas. If that exemption could be lifted from \$100,000 to \$500,000, that would be very beneficial to a lot of councils.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that is mostly a Main Roads initiative. I think that we would have to—

**The CHAIRMAN:** I agree. I think you should direct that to the Minister for Transport.

**Mr HOBBS:** With respect, I am sure it could be a whole-of-government approach, but the reality is that if we have get the support, for instance, of the Minister for Local Government -

**The CHAIRMAN:** We are not here to make statements; we are here to answer questions. I ask the member for Warrego what section in the MPS does this question relate to?

**Mr HOBBS:** It is in relation to finance, Mr Chairman. All I am asking is whether the minister has any objection to it. I am not asking for details on it. I am asking her if she would support it?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There are a lot of different issues at stake there. It is not solely local government. Certainly we would be looking at that—

**Mr HOBBS:** So you would not support it?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:**—along with a lot of other things to do with a lot of councils. As you are aware, the councils in Queensland are very diverse. You have the south-east corner where the problems for the councils are very different to the problems in regional Queensland and the regional cities and they are totally different to the problems in rural areas. I think at this stage some of the councils in rural areas are already having exemptions from those figures that you are talking about. It is an issue that needs to be discussed broadly, not just by this department but by a lot.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, minister. I refer to MPS page 2, the National Action Plan on Salinity and Water Quality, which states—

... over \$1 million in State funds will be made available to the Department over the next three years to build the capacity and understanding of local governments to enable their participation in catchment management decisions ...

Will that funding be used totally for the department or will some of those funds be used for outsourcing, for example, to the Queensland Local Government Association?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The national action plan will have a strong emphasis on the involvement of local government to deliver on priority projects

developed by the communities within the regional catchments to improve water quality. To date, most Queensland local governments in the priority regions have viewed their role in water quality matters as minor. The department has been funded for three years to build the capacity of local governments to a point where they can actively participate in the process of preparing accredited salinity and water quality plans, and develop mechanisms for interpreting the outcomes into their corporate and operational plans and their planning schemes. The department will be involved in training programs and the development of guidance and advice to local governments.

As a result, local government will develop ownership of the actions to be undertaken to improve water quality, which is so important. The funding will enable the department initially to build the capacity of those local governments in four priority regions, then expand the training to local governments Queensland wide. The department is seen as the key link between traditional natural resource management, integrated catchment management organisations and the local government sector. The department is, therefore, in the best position to train and advise local governments on those matters. That is what that money is going to be used for.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to sustainable development, MPS page 3, and SEQ 2021. You refer to a four-year program to develop a long-term strategy for sustainable development in the south-east Queensland regions. Will areas of green space be determined within the regions where future development could be curtailed?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** In the SEQ 2021? Are you talking about that particular plan?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think that that is specifically set out. There is very big committee working on *SEQ 2021—A Sustainable Future* and it is looking at a broad cross-section of concerns and planning for the future. I am quite certain that it will be looking at those subjects. At this stage, I do not think it has been clearly set out that that is going to be one, nor has it been clearly set out that any others have been identified. I think they are just looking at a broad cross-section of growth and growth capacity in their area.

**Mr HOBBS:** If it is sustainable development, you would have thought there would be areas that they would not want to develop.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am sure you are quite right. I am sure that they would be there. Brisbane City has certainly got its IPA plan completed. Those plans are showing the areas that should and should not be developed and used or maintained and protected. That is all set out in the individual plans. Whether 2021 will look closely at one specific area or not is really up to their committee.

**Mr HOBBS:** At dot point 5 on page 4 of the MPS you state that the department contributes towards promoting ecological sustainable growth in Queensland's regions. Can you give the committee some examples of the sustainable growth being contributed to by your department as stated in the MPS?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Would you mind asking the question again?

**Mr HOBBS:** It relates to dot point 5 on page 4.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What was the basis of the question?

**Mr HOBBS:** You state that you are developing policies, programs and promoting ecological sustainable growth and job creating investment. Whereabouts is that happening?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Queensland consists of a lot of different regions. All of those regions are looking at that sort of thing in their areas. That is the aim of the regional planning—not just to sustain growth and job creating investment but to look at attracting that sort of investment into their particular area. At the moment, this department has six different regional plans—the far-north Queensland plan, the Townsville/Thuringowa strategy plan, the Wide Bay 2020 regional plan, centred around my electorate of Bundaberg, the eastern Darling Downs land use strategy, the one that we were talking about a moment ago, the SEQ 2021 or the 2001 plan that has just been completed, and the western gateway area strategy. The far-north Queensland regional plan has been formally endorsed by state cabinet and the regional organisation of councils.

As to the current progress of Townsville/Thuringowa, it has been formally endorsed by state cabinet and the local governments of Townsville and Thuringowa. The progress of the Wide Bay 2020 regional plan was endorsed by cabinet in January 1998. It is now well and truly into its implementation phase. You may have read in the last week that a big development in our area has been approved with a lot of state government funding. That is for a chicory plant to be established between Bundaberg and Childers. These are the sorts of projects coming out of this regional planning. In the Wide Bay area we have a lot of unemployment. Of course, the 2020 regional plan is looking at the possible job creation and industrial development in that area. That is our No. 1 priority. In a lot of different areas the priorities change.

The recommendations of the eastern Darling Downs land use strategy are being implemented, where appropriate, through the planning schemes of the member local authorities. So again we get back to the importance of having those plans, the individual council plans, in place. All of those things are helping work towards sustainable management. It is looking at all of those different things that are affecting local governments and state government.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government questioning has expired.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Page 14 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements shows that the department administered \$449 million in local government grants and subsidies in 2000-01 but estimates \$437 million for 2001-02. Can the minister explain the decrease and does this justify the recent comments made by the Leader of the Opposition that local government is running on empty?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am very glad to be able to explain those figures that you have raised, because there has been a fair bit of scaremongering in the media since the budget was released. As I mentioned in my opening address, in real terms grant payments are actually expected to increase by \$10 million under this government in this financial year. If we take the 2000-01 estimated actual figure of \$449 million, there was an increase and this primarily relates to an increase in natural disaster relief funding to meet the requirements in that particular year. The NDRA is a cost-sharing agreement between the state and Commonwealth governments for a package of pre-agreed relief measures that may be activated by the Queensland government but on a needs basis. The NDRA assists the recovery of communities that have been affected by natural disaster by addressing specific needs that exist within a stricken community—for example, facilitating the restoration of damaged public infrastructure.

The 2000-01 estimated actual includes natural disaster relief funding of \$30 million provided as supplementation during that year. Therefore, if we look at the 2001-02 target figure of \$437 million, it does show a reduction and this reduction represents a lower budget allowance under the natural disaster relief funding arrangements. It is important to note that disaster relief funds are revisited during the course of a financial year and are adjusted based on actual requirements during that year—for instance, if there were a cyclone in north Queensland. The \$437 million in the budget appropriation available to make grant and subsidy payments to local governments is based on expected claims from local governments.

Estimates included in the department's funding model were compiled from the latest five-year forward programs of capital works supplied by local governments. That information to the department details expected new capital projects for the next five years, the amount of subsidy applicable and when councils expect to claim those subsidies on the projects. The department superimposed onto these estimates its own assumptions based purely on experience as to what might happen in respect of timing of grants and subsidy payments. Should the budget appropriation prove to be insufficient to meet all claims at 30 June next year additional funds will be provided by Queensland Treasury. I want to make this very clear: no eligible claims for payments will be denied or delayed provided all necessary conditions are met. Similarly, no approvals or invitations to apply for grants and subsidies will be delayed in this year.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Note 2 on page 14 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statements refers to the reclassification of NCP payments from controlled to administered. Could you please explain that?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The reclassification of NCP funds carried out last financial year was to better reflect accrual accounting principles. As you would be aware, one of the key components of the government's Managing for Outcomes framework is accrual output budgeting. Under that form of budgeting, funding provided to a department is classified according to one or two categories—controlled or administered. Controlled is where funding provided to a department can be used completely at the department's discretion. In comparison, when an agency administers funding its role is essentially that of a post box. In other words, the agency provided with the funding has no say in matters such as how those funds are disbursed or who will receive the funding or what amounts will be distributed.

Last financial year, funding of \$75.743 million was provided to the Department of Local Government and Planning for NCP. It was during this year that the classification of those funds as being controlled or administered was reviewed. In consultation with Queensland Treasury, this review concluded that the national competition policy funds were more appropriately reflected as being administered rather than controlled. This conclusion was based on the following factors: first, who makes the decision on how the funds are distributed? As you would be aware, the purpose of NCP moneys is to fund the progress of local governments against their NCP reform commitments. To be eligible, local governments nominate specific businesses for reform. The progress of each local government is assessed by the Queensland Competition Authority. The QCA then provides a report to the Premier and Treasurer, who are the ministers responsible for that funding, and these ministers can either accept or modify those recommendations.

As a result of all of the considerations that were taken into account and the finding that the Department of Local Government has no discretion over the use of national competition funding, it was concluded that these moneys should be classified as being administered. As a result, national competition funds are no longer reflected against the departmental outputs in the MPS but rather against administered items. This is clear from the increase in the figure for administered items shown on page 6 of the MPS. That is just a transfer of funds from one to another and that will reflect in both of those.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** The fifth dot point on page 17 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that the department has provided technical assistance about IPA plan making and infrastructure charging by providing both technical guidelines and direct training to local governments. Can you tell us about the IPA planning schemes and what the department is doing to assist councils to prepare these?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The planning schemes outline community expectations for the future development of their area. They are prepared with public involvement and provide the policy basis for council decision making on development applications. Apart from the IPA itself, planning schemes are the only other instruments in the Integrated Development Assessment System framework that have the power to declare development to be subject to regulation or to identify development as either self-assessable or assessable and specify the parameters for compliance or assessment.

Planning schemes are the only statutory instruments capable of dealing in a coordinated way with infrastructure and land use planning to meet growth expectations and for integrated state, regional and local planning outcomes. Existing planning schemes, as I said earlier, will lapse on 30 March 2003. They are all the varied plans in existence at the moment, unless I nominate a later date for particular schemes. But the specified date is five years after the commencement of IPA on 30 March 1998.

In order to maintain a system of development regulation to meet their communities' objectives, local governments with existing planning schemes will need to have adopted those IPA planning schemes by that date. I think I made it clear earlier that I will be insisting on that. I spoke earlier about this, too. Departmental officers meet with council staff and elected representatives, planning consultants and other stakeholder groups to explain the act's objectives and specific issues that need to be addressed. They provide whole-of-government input into the preparation of individual schemes, integrated state interest and best practice information.

There is a lot that goes into these plans and a lot of involvement by this department. We will be undertaking targeted workshops dealing with specific issues and providing assistance in the form of published guidelines, ready references, implementation notes and verbal advice on the preparation of IPA planning schemes and specific components such as codes, development assessment tables and infrastructure charges plans. The department is certainly assisting councils to have those schemes prepared, because if they are not prepared by that March 2003 date councils can find themselves in the position of not having any legal plan in place from that day on.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I refer you to dot point 6 on page 17 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, which indicates that the department introduced innovative operational improvements to IDAS in August 2000 by releasing a new generic

modular IDAS application form which facilitates lodgment of IDAS applications throughout the state. What is this new modular IDAS application form and how will it help the applicants and councils?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The new IDAS application and associated forms commenced on 14 August 2000. There was extensive consultation with stakeholders, local government, state agencies and industry about the preferred content and format of the forms, including a series of stakeholder workshops around Queensland. The new standardised forms are designed to be generic across the state and are able to be used by any person lodging an IDAS application anywhere in the state, whether the application is to a local government, state agency or to a private certifier. They replaced the numerous forms individually developed by local governments and agencies. There is a substantial reduction in the paperwork associated with making applications and elimination of the duplication of information that was associated with so many separately developed forms.

To assist availability, the forms are able to be downloaded free from the department's IPA web site. These electronic forms also allow applicants to input their details directly into the fields in the form. Applicants are then able to print out their completed forms for lodgment with the appropriate assessment manager. Ultimately, it is intended that applicants will be able to lodge their applications electronically as well.

In response to stakeholder concerns about the size and complexity of the previous forms, the new form has a modular structure. It comprises the standard face sheet for applicant and property details common to all applications, and subsequent pages are added depending on the nature of the proposal. The introduction of these forms reduces by over 50 per cent the paperwork associated with lodging a development application. Additionally, by having one standard set of forms, the potential for confusion by applicants who may lodge applications in more than one local government area is significantly reduced.

There are savings for both local governments and applicants. Local governments no longer have the expense and complexity associated with developing and printing development application forms. Applicants benefit from having only one set of forms with which to become familiar regardless of where they are developing or the nature of that development. A series of short guides and brochures support the forms to assist applicants prepare those development applications and to identify the applicable reference agencies. So that is a very, very big change for applicants and a very worthwhile change.

**Mr CUMMINS:** The ninth dot point on page 17 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that the department has continued preparation of the Whitsunday hinterland and Mackay region—and I realise that the chairman is excited by these projects. In relation to the Mackay Region 2015—WHAM 2015—and the Central Queensland a New Millennium—CQANM—regional planning projects, what is the current progress of both these projects?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The stage 1 regional position paper and stage 2 regional planning and development framework have been completed. Work is now progressing on the preparation of a final regional plan for the WHAM region. A draft plan has been distributed to state agencies and local governments as well as key community and interest groups for comment prior to further consideration by the Regional Planning Advisory Committee. The draft plan contains over 60 goals, 400 strategies and 12 structure plan maps. It will deal with all key elements of the region, including regional identity; leadership and management of natural resources and

the environment; regional economy; people, communities and culture; and urban development and infrastructure.

The regional structure plan will establish the preferred physical arrangements for the region and for its future development. It will identify regional settlement patterns, major infrastructure provision, environmental conservation areas, key economic resources and tourism centres. The Regional Planning Advisory Committee overseeing development of the plan has endorsed a process and timetable which should see the draft WHAM regional plan completed by the end of 2001. The next major step will be the release of that draft plan for public display and comment early in 2002, with the final plan endorsed by the end of 2002.

In relation to the current process of the central Queensland project, the draft regional growth management framework document has been distributed to state agencies and local governments in addition to key sector groups for their consideration and feedback. Following this sector consultation phase, the central Queensland Regional Planning Advisory Committee will consider all feedback submitted and review the draft regional growth management framework prior to broad community consultation. I think that this points out clearly the amount of consultation that goes into preparing these regional plans.

The community consultation phase will occur during July and August of 2001. The sector and community consultation phases are key milestones in the preparation of that plan for consideration then by cabinet. The draft detailed policies for that plan and policy actions under the following six theme areas are resource use, conservation and management; knowledge and information; planning and governance; social and cultural development; economic development; and infrastructure. Technical papers covering those six themes have been completed, and the central Queensland Regional Planning Advisory Committee has endorsed the establishment of special purpose action groups.

**Mr CUMMINS:** On the same page, page 17 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, the ninth dot point indicates that your department has continued with the implementation of the Far North Queensland Regional Plan, Wide Bay 2020, SEQ 2001 and the Eastern Darling Downs Land Use Strategy. I realise that my fellow committee member the member for Darling Downs is probably well abreast of this, and I hope I am not stealing any of his thunder as I realise that the Eastern Darling Downs Land Use Strategy would be of great use to him. Also the Townsville-Thuringowa Strategy Plan and the Western Gateway Area Strategy are mentioned. Can you tell us about the current progress of some of these plans?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** With regard to the Far North Queensland Regional Plan, a number of priority projects and activities have been progressed over the past year. These include the pilot project to identify and integrate state interests including regional plan outcomes into local government planning schemes—we are back to those local government planning schemes again that are so important—development of regional performance indicators to monitor economic, environment and social changes; development of a web-based action tracker, covering over 900 regional plan recommendations; feasibility investigations for future urban settlement on the northern tablelands; investigations into the upgrading of the Kuranda Range road and Cairns southern transport corridor as major road links for the region; commencement of the Cairns integrated public transport study; and further developments of the region's environment and natural resources data.

Significant implementation outcomes have included the preparation of the Integrated Regional Transport Plan, development of a Ross River catchment

management plan, mapping of concern ecosystems, integration of recommendations and outcomes into the local government planning schemes for Townsville and Thuringowa, provision of suitably located and serviced land for major industry, and development of a regional fire management strategy. The Townsville-Thuringowa area will continue to be implemented through the work programs and policies of state agencies and local government, including integration of regional planning outcomes into the local government planning scheme.

With regard to the Wide Bay 2020 Regional Plan, major outcomes achieved there to date include design, installation and commercialisation of a world-class digital telecommunications network; development of various online services to assist the implementation of other policy actions; preparation of the Wide Bay regional integrated transport network; preparation and endorsement of integrated catchment management strategies for the Mary, Burnett and Baffle catchments; preparation of the Burnett-Mary regional strategy for natural resource management and biodiversity conservation; and development of the Wide Bay urban services network.

Then if we go on further to the Eastern Darling Downs Land Use Strategy, those recommendations are being implemented, where appropriate, through planning schemes, again, of the member local authorities. All member councils are undertaking preparation of those plans. We can go on and on about the different plans. They are certainly undertaking very important work and they are showing results.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for government members' questions has now expired.

**Mr HOBBS:** In your statement you say that you are promoting ecological, sustainable growth and job creation and investment. You mentioned chicory and Bundaberg and Wide Bay employment and that type of thing. Obviously State Development plays a big part in those. What is your department then envisaging for the western regions and the northern regions of Queensland?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is probably a question that should go directly to the Minister for State Development. This department—

**Mr HOBBS:** So this is not yours after all? You said chicory was part of yours.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** No, I did not say it was part of mine. I said that that was one of the outcomes from that area of all the work done by the community and the groups—the local government and the community input. They are working toward identifying these issues that can be of benefit to their areas and doing the lobbying that is necessary to get those things under way. That has been happening.

This department is looking more at regional planning, looking at the local authorities probably because it is the Department of Local Government and Planning. We are looking at encouraging the development of regional plans so that, instead of working individually as a council as happened in the past, they are now working with member councils in their areas, working with community, working with state agencies to get a better outcome for their area.

**Mr HOBBS:** What sort of examples can you give me? I would like to hear some examples, and I am sure the community would, too. I would like some examples of how that is actually happening say, for instance, in the western and northern regions.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think I was just filling you in on some of the results of some of those planning bodies. When it comes to a development project, that is

clearly in the portfolio of the Minister for State Development, and those questions should be addressed to him.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to page 3 of the MPS and the Local Government Grants Commission methodology. Do you support a review of the Queensland methodology used to determine the Queensland Grants Commission funding to local government?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, I most certainly do support that. In fact, with regard to the local government grants, there is a lot of concern at the moment in councils right throughout Queensland. As you probably are aware, in the past few years many of the councils in Queensland have taken reductions. Not only does that cut their finances short for the year, but it often comes in after the budgets have been set for those councils. It does create a lot of concern for them. At the moment, councils in Queensland are concerned because they are looking at the announcement of another decrease in the next few weeks. That has been a major concern.

Because the Commonwealth has been reviewing the Grants Commission's system—and that review came out just a few weeks ago—and because the Queensland Grants Commission term expires in, I believe, October of this year, a new Grants Commission will be appointed in Queensland. I am certainly in support of that commission undertaking a review into the methodology that is being used in Queensland as quickly as possible. Anybody who has been in local government knows full well that the methodology that has been used is confusing, to say the least. Nobody really understands it. Nobody is happy with it. As I mentioned before, the announcements are made after our local councils have set their budget. Yes, that has to be reviewed.

<sup>005</sup> In this day and age, the methodology has to be transparent. We all have to be able to see exactly how that is set out. What I would like to see from the review is a clearer methodology and one that is understood by councils, one that has more transparency and one that can be announced at a better time for our local councils. It has actually been decided to undertake that review. I am very much in support of it. The intention is to issue an options discussion paper asking for submissions from councils. A draft report would be released for further comment before the final report. The commission met on 10 July 2001 to discuss a number of issues, including the scope of that review. That will proceed just as quickly as we can. Certainly, with the appointment of the new commission, that will be its first job.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, can you give examples of local governments being disadvantaged under the present system?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Some councils certainly believe that they have been disadvantaged and others do not, of course, because—

**Mr HOBBS:** Some always do, don't they? It has been going on for 24 years.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** As I said earlier, there is such diversity in our councils. Some rely more heavily on the grants than others.

**Mr HOBBS:** You must have been given some examples that you think are not quite right.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There are a lot of examples out there. I would not look at one or the other. There are a lot of examples out there of councils that do feel that it is not fair and that it is not a good system. Because the Commonwealth's review was under way, because we are wanting a review in Queensland, because we have a new commission about to be appointed in Queensland, I wrote to

Senator Macdonald and said that, in relation to our grants which are to be allocated in the next few weeks for this year, I wanted no council to decrease. I wanted no council to lose anything in this particular year. Some clearly will go up a little bit, because the grants have gone up a little bit. While these reviews are under way this year, I wanted to stabilise it so that no council in Queensland would lose on their grants in this financial year.

That issue has been a matter of disagreement between the federal minister and myself. Senator Macdonald declined our recommendation in the first place. I wrote to him again and received a reply only yesterday. We have had a win for Queensland. As of yesterday, Senator Macdonald has agreed that no grants for Queensland governments will go down in this financial year. That is great news for our councils.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, while the majority of councils probably are satisfied with the present methodology—but you are right; there are a few which have some problems—by the same token I have been involved with local government for 24 years. When Charlie Palmer first put in the Grants Commission people were unclear of the methodology, and have been unclear about it ever since. I am not sure whether there will ever be a clear methodology if people think that they are missing out, but that is the way life is.

Are you aware that there are three town councils which are unique, that is, Roma, Dalby and Goondiwindi, that are disadvantaged under the present system or formula? In the forthcoming review, will you recommend to the Grants Commission that an addendum or something like that be considered to specifically stop the discrimination against those particular shires with a population under 10,000? I am talking about those particular three shires that are unique in Queensland.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think there are a lot of issues to be addressed by the Grants Commission. You are quite right in what you have said. You were in local government a lot longer than I was. I only go back 13 years. I can recall when I first became mayor of Bundaberg that I asked the commission to come to Bundaberg to explain to us exactly how that methodology worked. We were none the wiser, and I am sure other councils in Queensland faced the same problem. I can understand those three councils feeling that they are being badly treated, but there are 125 councils in Queensland. I do not think any of them are happy with the methodology.

Some feel that their allocations have dropped too far whilst other allocations have remained the same. If a council gets a five per cent decrease in its allocation for the year, in some councils that is not a lot. In other councils, that is a huge amount to lose after you have already set your budget for the year. So there are problems all round with that methodology. After the completion of IPA planning, this is my second priority. We desperately need a new methodology. It is up to the new commission to look at exactly what is needed.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to dot point 6 of the MPS at page 8. Do you support the Electoral Commission of Queensland conducting future local government elections?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What page, sorry?

**The CHAIRMAN:** It says 'assessing the possible involvement of the Electoral Commission of Queensland'.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is certainly something that is being looked at. I think that that suggestion has been made. It certainly does have some merit. I

believe that there is a review under way looking at whether that is the way to go or not. In general terms, it is expected that a number of the larger, more urbanised local governments would benefit from having the option of arranging for the Electoral Commission to conduct elections, because at the moment that job is done by CEOs. In the larger councils, the CEOs are really too busy to undertake that work during the year. The increasing demands on CEOs and their changing role in larger urban councils have been factors in councils calling for a greater range of alternatives for organising and conducting elections. It would also reduce the risk of negative effects on relationships with future councillors as a result of the decisions that have to be made affecting the election or the candidates by the CEO while performing his or her role as returning officer.

Another advantage for local governments would be reduced disruption to other council business because of the CEO conducting those elections. So there are problems there for CEOs and the way it has been done in the past. I would not like to pre-empt what would come out of a review, but there certainly does seem to be very good reasons why that should happen. We will wait to see what comes out of it.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to the staff estimates at page 7 of the MPS. I note that there is no increase in the staff estimates for the Department of Local Government. Can I assume that the funding that is being provided to improve fire safety standards, implementation of IPA and IDAS and salinity and water quality will be outsourced away from the department, or are these funds used to top up existing salaries of departmental staff?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Thank you for that question. That is a very good question. I am going to ask the director-general to fill you in on the finer points of that.

**Dr CAMPBELL:** In all of those activities where we receive one-off funding for a particular year, a lot of that money is often spent on bringing temporary appointments in, so to an extent it is outsourced. The figure of full-time equivalent employees does not change, but the number of temporaries in the department does swing up and down with those one-off funds that come in each year.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thanks for that. Minister, I note that the Auditor-General's report makes reference to the continued serious financial discrepancies in Aboriginal councils. What input does your department have in improving the financial accountability of those councils? Do you have input into that?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Which page are you referring to?

**Mr HOBBS:** It is the Auditor-General's report. This is local government in general. The question I asked you on notice related to the Auditor-General's report in relation to the qualified audits that came back from councils. You have answered that question adequately on notice. But I have a further question in relation to the Auditor-General's report relating to councils. The Auditor-General does say that there are some serious financial problems there. Does your department have input into how we help those people resolve those issues?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will ask the director-general to answer that.

**Dr CAMPBELL:** In terms of the Aboriginal councils, we do not have an input. We do have an input in the 125 that are under our control.

**Mr HOBBS:** Fine. Minister, I refer you to dot point 4 of page 9 of the MPS. I note that you have done a review of the operational arrangements and framework for the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council. Minister, did you find any evidence in that review of sly grogging at Aurukun?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You are certainly giving me an array of questions. Under the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978, as soon as practicable after 30 June 2001 I must undertake a review of the operations of part 6 to establish whether it continues to meet the needs of the Aurukun community, that is, a review of the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council. The report on the outcome of the review must be tabled in parliament prior to 30 June 2002. Part 6 of the act was introduced in March 1995 to assist the Aurukun community to control sly grogging and drinking in public and private places—that is not the way I would put it, actually—in the Aurukun shire.

**Mr HOBBS:** Keep reading, Minister, keep reading.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** It has established the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council, which comprises community elders representing the recognised traditional clan groupings in the shire. It has the power to decide which places in the shire of Aurukun will be declared dry and to allow, under certain conditions, the possession or consumption of alcohol in controlled places.

In relation to the outcome of the previous reviews into the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council, the council was established initially on a trial basis for two years until 1 December 1997. Its life was extended to 30 June 1999 to allow for the first evaluation of its operations. A review of the statutory framework for controlling the possession and consumption of alcohol and the workability of the administrative and decision-making frameworks was undertaken by the department in December 1998. This review resulted in minor changes to address administrative problems and concluded that the legislation should continue after 30 June 1999.

Legislation was subsequently approved to implement the minor changes to repeal the sunset clause and provide for a review of the operations in 2001-02, with a report to be tabled in parliament by June. Before that review, there was limited utilisation of the mechanisms available to control sly groggers and people drinking in public. Since the review and the resolution of operational teething problems, there have been closures of certain areas to alcohol and successful seizures of alcohol by the police and court actions in relation to those activities.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, Minister. I refer to dot point 3 at page 9 of the MPS under 'Future Developments'. Minister, you are developing draft legislative proposals to address issues identified during the March 2000 elections. What are those issues that you have identified?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** As you would be aware, after each local government election, including those held in March 2000, the department reviews the legislative framework to deal with any issues or problems that arose during those elections. Additional issues that have been raised by local governments as part of this review include the 10-day requirement for receipt of postal ballots, the introduction of statewide absentee voting, the introduction of postal ballots in urban areas, the extension of the election period to allow for mail delays in western Queensland, enforcement procedures, the process for resolving a tied vote and the election of all Queensland mayors by optional preferential voting, regardless of the method used to elect the other councillors. These are all issues that have been raised by local governments as part of that review.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government questions has expired. I now call the member for Kawana.

**Mr CUMMINS:** On page 18 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, under the heading 'Future developments', dot point 11 indicates that the department will assist

councils to prepare IPA-compatible planning schemes by providing technical guidelines, direct training and advisory services. I think the shadow minister for local government and planning, the member for Warrego, has already touched on the valuable assistance your department provides to Queensland councils. Will your department provide a model scheme to assist the smaller and less well-resourced councils? What implications for IPA planning arise out of the IPA operational review? What assistance will be given to councils in preparing their infrastructure charging plans?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We are getting a lot of questions on IPA, but it is the very big issue in local government at the moment. It is very important at this point in time, when we are 20 months in. A model planning scheme based on a real-life situation is being prepared by the department. This will lead to a series of practical guidelines. It is proposed to publish examples of helpful scheme structures, approaches and content on the IPA website in the near future. This will provide a valuable template which local governments will be able to use and tailor to their own particular circumstances. I believe that model plan should be completed by late August and will then be available to councils. It will be invaluable to a lot of the smaller councils.

I refer to the implications for IPA plan making that will arise from the operational review. A lot of councils are concerned that they do not want to progress their planning at this stage because that review is under way, but it has limited implications for plan making. The majority of issues raised by submissions on the operational review focused on more procedural improvements to chapter 3 of the IPA, which deals with the Integrated Development Assessment System.

In regard to plan making, the most significant change is likely to be in relation to the preparation and operation of infrastructure charges plans. Little if any change is proposed to planning scheme requirements, such as the core matters they should be looking at right now. As a result, local governments preparing those planning schemes do not need to be concerned about the impact of the review on their initial plan making.

I will outline the assistance that will be given to councils in preparing the infrastructure charges plans. The current regime is considered by key stakeholders to be too complex, too costly and too difficult to implement for the majority of local governments and is not necessary for many of the smaller councils experiencing little or no growth. Accordingly, as part of the operational review of the IPA infrastructure provisions it is proposed that that be modified to substantially reduce the level of complexity in preparing and maintaining infrastructure plans. This has been a significant task involving consultation with local governments and the development industry.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Page 12 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements outlines that simplified arrangements have been put in place for councils to apply for subsidy under the local government bodies' capital works subsidy scheme. How have the arrangements been changed and simplified?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The local government bodies' capital works subsidy scheme is largely a percentage-based subsidy scheme providing assistance to local governing bodies towards the capital costs of infrastructure. That includes water supply and treatment works, sewage treatment works, sewage effluent reuse schemes, public amenities, libraries, swimming pools, cultural centres and most community facilities. A grant for road and drainage works is also given under that scheme.

In the past, the department has required councils to submit an annual capital works program and subsidy application by the end of January each year, listing projects and subsidy estimates for work planned in the following financial year. This was accompanied by a five-year estimate of capital works for future budget planning. As councils do not adopt their budgets until later in the year, this has meant that many projects are modified, replaced or cancelled. Recording and monitoring these changes consumed unnecessary administrative effort. While councils are still requested to submit a five-year summary of funding requirements by the end of January each year, they are no longer required to submit subsidy applications by that date. Applications can now be submitted at any time when council is reasonably confident that the project will proceed. Councils can seek in-principle decisions on subsidy eligibility to assist with that planning. That provides councils with the option of waiting until after their budget process before submitting those funding applications.

As well as written advice, councils are being advised of this through visits by departmental officers. To date 86 councils have been visited. The visits are also intended to update councils' knowledge of the processes involved in applying for subsidies under that scheme. So it is very valuable work that is being done there in conjunction with councils to bring them up to date with the changes that are occurring with the applications for that funding.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Page 12 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements outlines that the department conducted workshops and/or visited some 107 councils to explain and assist with the preparation of applications under a number of programs. What was the purpose of the workshops and the visits for each of these programs?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The purpose of workshop visits for each of the programs is very similar. The Security Improvement Program is aimed at providing enhanced security infrastructure in existing public places and provides a subsidy of up to 50 per cent to local governments to help fund approved capital works which meet the objectives of that program. While the program has been very popular with provincial centres and Brisbane City Council, there have not been many applications from the smaller local governments. For example, of the 162 applications received to date, only 29 applications, including 19 from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils, have been submitted from small, remote councils.

The purpose of the visits has been twofold: to increase awareness of the program and to provide guidance and assistance on the development of projects and applications under that program. Workshops have been conducted in 10 regional centres, in conjunction with the Queensland Police Service's Crime Prevention Unit. More than 180 participants, representing 55 local councils, the local police and other interested parties, have attended those workshops. They have been extremely well received by the participants. With regard to a lot of the subsidies that are being paid, the aim of workshops is to improve councils' understanding of the guidelines for receiving funds.

Councils are not terribly aware of how they go about applying for funds under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements. The aim of workshops there is to improve councils' understanding, help those councils to satisfactorily complete the applications, improve understanding between the Department of Main Roads and councils of the roles of each following the activation of the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements, and improve understanding of the role of the counter-disaster operations and the types of natural disaster expenditure claimable. These sorts of workshops are being held in a lot of council areas in relation to a lot of different

subsidies. It is to help councils better understand how they can apply for funds and what is available.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Page 12 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that the Rural Living Infrastructure Program was continued in 2000-01. What is the Rural Living Infrastructure Program and when will more funding be offered?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Rural Living Infrastructure Program is another of the funding programs that is available through this department. It provides funding to smaller local governments, with less than 15,000 population, to enhance the quality of life of people living in rural Queensland. The program demonstrates the government's continued commitment to rural and remote communities disadvantaged by location, size and a limited local government rate base.

A total of 93 local governments and 32 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils are eligible to apply for funding under the Rural Living Infrastructure Program. It provides assistance to councils to provide or improve community, recreational and sporting facilities and tourism. The first round of those applications for funding from this new commitment closed on 15 September 2000. A total of 95 councils were offered funding totalling \$7.7 million for 150 projects.

With regard to that particular funding program, I intend to invite the next round of applications in April or May 2002 so that other councils with populations under 15,000 will be eligible to apply for that assistance. It is certainly doing a wonderful job in remote Queensland. In the last few weeks I have been to Hughenden, Winton, Springsure and Kingaroy—a lot of those areas. They are providing a lot of infrastructure that previously, before a lot of these programs came on line, they just could not afford to provide for their communities.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Page 12 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that further funding was allocated in 2000-01 from programs such as the Smaller Communities Assistance Program. Can you tell us about the Smaller Communities Assistance Program and how much money has been allocated from this program?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** This is one of my very favourite programs, so I am pleased to answer. The Smaller Communities Assistance Program assists smaller communities by subsidising water supply and sewerage infrastructure essential to maintain basic public health and wellbeing which these communities would not otherwise be able to reasonably afford. Not necessarily but certainly up to a 100 per cent subsidy of the capital cost can be made available under this scheme. Smaller communities are classified for this program as communities with a population of less than 5,000 people. These are communities which, through their very small population and their small rate base, have not been able to provide the basic services of water and sewerage that we all take for granted. Some of these communities have been settled for 100 years and they have never been able to provide them. This is what is happening now through this program.

The budget for this fund is \$150 million over the 10 years, up to 2005-06. The program was part of a \$600 million-plus package announced in the 1996-97 state budget. It also doubled the standard subsidy for water and sewerage to 40 per cent and introduced a 50 per cent subsidy for effluent re-use and the \$7 million Advanced Waste Water Treatment Technologies Program.

<sup>007</sup> Applications for SCAP funding are lodged by councils in response to periodic invitations to submit applications. Six such invitations have been made to date. There have been a small number of projects and requests for additional funds for projects funded outside these invitation rounds.

The Department of Natural Resources and Mines provides technical assistance in evaluating these applications. And in determining priorities the key criteria have been security of supply and quantity or quality of water for water supply projects and improvement to public health outcomes for sewerage projects.

I think that when we talk about how much has been allocated and when is the next round of offers—in January 2001, \$19.2 million was allocated for 18 planning and feasibility studies and 31 construction projects in the sixth round of funding offers, and these were chosen from applications for projects costing \$119 million. As at 30 June 2001, \$106.8 million of the \$150 million has been offered to 188 projects, including 47 planning studies in 77 councils. So there is a lot of demand for these funds. They are very well used, and it is great to see these facilities being provided to these very small communities

**Ms MOLLOY:** Page 12 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that the funding for local government infrastructure and facilities output allocated further funding for programs, including Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements. What are the natural disaster relief arrangements, and what funds are available in the 2001-02 budget?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements is a cost-sharing agreement between the state and the Commonwealth governments for a package of pre-agreed relief measures that may be activated by the Queensland government on a needs basis. It assists the recovery of communities that have been affected by a natural disaster by addressing specific needs that exist within the stricken community, such as to facilitate the restoration of damaged public infrastructure, provide counter-disaster operations, alleviate personal hardship and distress and ensure the safety of life, health and property. My department administers the provision of financial assistance to restore local government assets damaged by natural disasters.

The 2001-02 budget appropriation of \$63 million is based on the value of claims from known disaster events expected to be received in this financial year. They are events that have already occurred, and we are expecting to provide that assistance in this financial year. If claims exceed the \$63 million that is in the budget, additional funds will be provided by Treasury to meet those claims. The budget does not make allowance for disasters which may occur. We have to wait and see. We might be very lucky this year. We might not have any. And that is something we could all look forward to.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for government members' questions has expired.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, you may be aware that AQIS and the pork industry have raised grave concerns regarding the prospect of foot-and-mouth disease being spread throughout Queensland by feral pigs feeding in town rubbish dumps. Should there ever be an incursion of that disease here, surely that is a risk that we could not condone. Would you consider providing the funding that councils have sought to properly manage these dumps? And will funding be available under the Landfill Remediation Assessment Program, of which I note you have \$0.56 million allocated for this financial year? Could they use that funding to perhaps fence these dumps?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that you are probably aware that the assessment program has been going on for some time. The \$7.5 million Landfill Remediation Assessment Program provides up to 50 per cent financial assistance to local government to investigate the extent, if any, of environmental and public

health risks from council owned or controlled closed landfill sites. Of course, as you are saying, this is for the assessment of those landfill sites.

The program targets closed landfills, mainly because it is more difficult for local governments to raise revenue for those, whereas work required on operating facilities can be factored into charges. The program was introduced as a result of the LGAQ request prior to the 1998 state election for a state government 50 per cent subsidy to assist councils with what they estimated as the \$700 million works program to remediate closed landfill sites. The figure was an estimate by the LGAQ at that time. Prior to the recent election, they asked again for that, but their estimate had dropped from \$700 million to \$500 million.

But I think that what we see from this is that nobody knows how much money is going to be needed to remedy the problems of landfill sites. At this stage, that figure is just up in the air. Nobody knows what it is. It is very difficult for any government to provide funding for an unknown figure. So what is happening here with the assessment program—there has been a disappointing response to that from councils, and the money that has been put forward for that assessment program has nowhere near been used. What we are going to do now as a government is try to encourage councils to get those assessments done so that we can work out exactly where we are going with that remedial work, exactly how much money would be required and exactly how many dumps there are out there that would need remedial treatment. None of that information is available, so it is really premature for a government to put forward money in a budget to rectify a problem with no idea of the extent of the problem.

Councils have been very slow at taking up the offer of funding to do the assessments. We are going to encourage them to do that. There was a time line. The director-general might be able to tell me this. The assessments were for dump sites that were closed prior to 1998. What we have done in this budget is we have extended that to include all closed landfill sites, not just those that closed before 1998. So we are now asking councils to apply for that funding, let us have a look at exactly what the problem is, get that funding, do the assessments and then, as a government, we will all know exactly what costs are involved.

**Mr HOBBS:** So therefore, councils that might have eight, 10 or 12 dumps in their regions because they have a lot of small towns—they would be eligible? Because of this foot-and-mouth scare at present, would they be able to use that money to assess whether they have problems in their regions? And if not, would there be any sort of help that you can offer—or sympathy—to local government in that respect?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The program for assessment is only relating to closed dumps—dumps that have closed. That is all that assessment program is for. Are you talking about dump sites that are currently operating?

**Mr HOBBS:** Presently now, where wild pigs can get access to them, for instance.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think there is any funding available for that at this stage.

**Mr HOBBS:** Would you be prepared to have a look at it and see what you can do to help?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, I will certainly look at it. We will look and see if there is any way that we can help. But it is really important for councils to get those assessments in, because until that happens the government has no idea how many

sites out there do have problems and how many have been closed. We have no idea of those details. We need those details. So I believe those councils in those areas should get their assessments done and put forward their applications for assistance.

**Mr HOBBS:** On page 9, dot point six, you talk about improving the overall performance of local government with the development and delivery of management and organisational development programs, promotion of best practice, and identifying strategies to better deliver efficient and integral local regulatory frameworks and systems. I note, however, that on the next page, page 10 of the MPS, in the output statement the number of policy papers proposed for this financial year is only one. It seems as if there are a lot of words and not a lot of action going on here, minister.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, would you like to take that question on notice?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes. That would be good. It would save time.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thanks for that. Minister, I notice that you have answered a couple of questions in relation to the grants and subsidy program in this year. I notice you are proposing to spend \$437 million—a reduction of \$12 million—and you have stated some reasons. You said it shows a reduction, but it is not going to be a reduction. Therefore, I presume from what you have said that if councils submit for the forthcoming year funding submissions in excess of what you have budgeted—say, another \$12 million perhaps, the same as last year—you will pay that. Minister, what is the process you have to go through if you require additional funding for grants and subsidies over and above the allocation for this financial year?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What process the department goes through?

**Mr HOBBS:** For instance, if your budget says \$437 million and they come in at \$12 million more, do you write them a cheque? What happens?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Certainly not. They are not all subsidies.

**Mr HOBBS:** I am talking about subsidies. What you have said is there is no problem, the funds are there; if the applications come in, you will accept them.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** If they qualify for that subsidy, yes.

**Mr HOBBS:** But if they go over the money, how do you pay for it?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** If they qualify for that subsidy, this department would make application through Treasury. Mr Campbell will give us the finer points of that.

**Mr CAMPBELL:** I am advised that we have a written agreement with Treasury on those allocated funding programs. I think natural disaster relief is probably the only one we have gone over on in the past. But if we did go over, there is an agreement where we would approach Treasury for those funds.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thanks for that. Minister, you state that you have progressed the IPA operational review by preparing draft legislative amendments. You stated in parliament that you would have these amendments in parliament by June 2001. The first time I asked you the question in the parliament you said June. More recently, you said they would be in the parliament by the end of the year. We are up to 19 or 20 months behind time now. What has been the hold-up in this legislation? Why can we not progress it faster?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think probably it is because of the number of submissions that came in that had to be gone through. I believe that I said we would

have the draft ready for June. Once that draft is completed, it then takes some time to go through community or stakeholder consultation. Councils will probably have copies of it. The discussions will take place with them. Discussions will take place with yourself. Discussions will take place with the stakeholder groups.

The operational review was an opportunity to obtain those views on how IPA and IDAS are functioning in practice and to finetune its operation in response to the experience gained in the first years after commencement of that act. The focus is on identifying procedural and administrative improvements to the IPA and IDAS. And where operational efficiencies can be obtained, major changes to the underlying principles of IPA are not intended at this stage.

Progress on that review during the last year included: finalisation of the operational review report and recommendations and a major workshop of key stakeholders to discuss the recommendations; cabinet authority to prepare a bill reflecting those recommendations; preparation of the bill and associated material, including a rewrite of the regulation; preparation of draft statutory guidelines for a material change of use and for environmental impact assessment; and preparation of a position paper for further changes to the act's infrastructure charging processes.

<sup>008</sup> The results of that review should be available, as I said, and I do not believe that I said it would be in parliament in June; I believe I said that the draft should be available in June. We are in July now, and that draft is complete. We are now going into the consultation period with stakeholders. As I said recently, that bill should be before the House before Christmas—before the end of the year. But the bill addressing legislative amendments is likely, as I said, to be introduced into the parliament before the end of the year. Other recommendations such as the provision of training and the preparation of information materials are already being progressively addressed. Those things are all under way at the moment. The introduction of the bill will be preceded by a period of stakeholder input, including an in-depth workshop for key stakeholders, the normal consideration by state agencies and the provision of information about the recommendations to be progressed as legislative amendments to all local governments and to opposition spokesmen on the IPA.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I think that you are going to have great difficulty in getting councils to comply by 2003 simply because of the amendments that are coming up. They will not know what they are, so I think that we are going to have some real problems down the track there. I think that there is a real need to speed it up. I also note in the coming year you have estimated a 75 per cent completion—this is on page 19. You say that the percentage completion of the IPA consequential legislative amendments program is 75 per cent. With the lead time that you have had in this program already, I would have thought 100 per cent would have been a more appropriate target. We are talking about the end of this financial year. So we are talking about May 2002, and then you are going to have only a very short period before councils the next year have to have the IPA in place.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I can understand that there is a concern with some local councils that they will not have their plans ready in time. They are already asking for extensions. I have said clearly at a number of local government conferences in the past few months that it is in everybody's best interests that those plans are completed. I think every council has to put their best foot forward and give priority to getting this planning in place.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, but this is the department, though. This one is you.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The department will address the plans as they come through. But as I have said recently, if 75 plans are put on our table in March 2003, there is going to be a problem. But I do not think that councils are that irresponsible. I think that they are going to comply with my request to speed up this process and to ensure that their plans are all in place so that after March 2003 everybody is working on that level playing field—everybody will be working to an IPA-compliant scheme after that date. That is going to overcome a lot of the problems that are in place at the moment. A lot of the problems we hear about the IPA are coming from councils that do not have their plans finished. So they are really trying to look at IPA legislation with an old plan, and some of them are very, very old.

Right now, four councils have completely adopted the planning schemes. They are Warwick, Maryborough, Maroochy and Brisbane. Of the remaining 121 local governments in Queensland, 22 have taken no action to commence preparation of their schemes. The model or template plan that is being developed now and will be available in August is going to be of enormous help to get those 22 councils up and running. Forty-one are preparing a statement of proposals, or have a statement on public display and 58 are either preparing the scheme or having a scheme on public display. So most of our councils are at some stage in that IPA development planning. I think that from here on we can expect a lot more plans to be coming through. There are others now to the public consideration stage, so they are only a very short way away from being adopted. I think that, in the first stages, it was very slow, but it is—

**Mr HOBBS:** The councils may be behind, too, but I think the department—or you—are basically dragging the chain with this. Anyway, that is something that we have talked about, and I hope that we can resolve that very quickly.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that—

**Mr HOBBS:** Some land-holders do not have access roads. While the council may be willing to construct one, they are finding it increasingly difficult, unless a clear access road to the property has been gazetted. Would you be prepared to consider legislative changes to the act that will allow councils to genuinely construct and maintain an access road and give that council legislative responsibility to provide that access road and clearly remove any repercussion on individual councillors who are carrying out what the community would assume is a normal activity of councils?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** With regard—

**Mr HOBBS:** In other words, what I am saying is that there are many access roads out there that are not on the gazetted roads, for instance, but councils are really reluctant to maintain them because of litigation perhaps that may come back against them.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Can you give me an example of that?

**Mr HOBBS:** Throughout the whole state—there are a lot of areas. For instance, you may have a landlocked block of land without an official access road whose unofficial road goes to it and stops. Because it is not a common road, or used by other people, the councils cannot maintain that road because, if somebody sued them, the councillors would be responsible.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Because of the access road? I believe that there is a review being undertaken at this stage looking at that very problem.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is good. At last year's estimates Minister Mackenroth stated that he expected most councils to adopt recommended principles and

methodologies for setting changes under the Building Act. Those guidelines were expected to be released at the end of September 2000. How many councils have taken up those recommendations?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is in the Building Act?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will see if we can get you that information.

**Mr KURU:** I understand that councils are currently in the process of preparing those budgets and many are currently using those guidelines to review their charges. We do not actually have the data at this stage.

**Mr HOBBS:** It is under way?

**Mr KURU:** We understand that, through the council's budget-setting process, many are using the guidelines, yes.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. At page 18, dot point four, you state under 'Future Developments' that you want to develop new building and plumbing codes which respond to emerging community needs by introducing new requirements for aged care and access for people with disabilities. What impact would these proposed new building and plumbing codes have on, say, the new pedestrian bridge across the Brisbane River or the South Bank development, or Lang Park?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is a very complex question. I think that I would rather take that on notice and give you that information. It is very difficult to answer it in three minutes.

**Mr HOBBS:** Absolutely. I am looking forward to the answer. With reference to the integrated planning legislation, which received bipartisan support for its introduction and as the coalition is prepared to offer bipartisan support for the self-certification of plumbing development approvals, as many plumbers currently work on a contract basis, will you as Minister for Local Government proceed with enabling legislation for private plumbing certification to occur?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You are wanting to know if we are going to implement private certification?

**Mr HOBBS:** For plumbing.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Right. I think that when the current approval processes in the Sewerage and Water Supply Act 1949 are integrated into the integrated development assessment system, a faster and more accountable decision-making process will be introduced. However, private certification of plumbing work will not be introduced until the following issues are addressed, and this is very important: the private building certification system, until that is operating to the government's, to the public's and to local government's satisfaction; until agreement has been reached with key stakeholders on the most appropriate plumbing certification model for Queensland; and until concerns about the likely impact on the employment of local government planning inspectors has been addressed.

I think that the current sewerage and water supply laws that commenced in April 1998 introduced options for councils to approve as constructed plans for plumbing work. This has to a great extent addressed the industry's criticisms of council delays in approving plumbing work with the adoption of this system by many councils. So a lot of those problems that were there have been overcome. The ability to dispense with the preparation of plans before work starts has delivered many of the benefits

sought by the industry while retaining the probity of the mandatory inspection and approval of plumbing work by local governments.

I am aware of concerns that the inconsistent interpretation of plumbing legislation by councils is impeding the ability of plumbers to comply with the requirements. My department delivers a range of advisory services, including direct telephone advice, local and regional seminars, workshops and publications that are targeted at improving the consistency of the interpretation of plumbing legislation by councils. So there is work being done there, but until those other criteria are met, the plumbing certification will not be going ahead.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government members' questions has expired.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I refer you again to page 12 of your MPS. It says here that some \$1.1 million was allocated from the Security Improvement Program in 2000-01. Can you tell us a bit about that program and its role in the Queensland crime prevention strategy?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Security Improvement Program—and I think I spoke on this earlier—provides a subsidy of up to 50 per cent to local governments for works to improve public safety in existing public places, and \$2 million per annum is allocated to the program. That program commenced as a pilot program in 1998-99. The objectives of it are to assist local governments to improve their stock of infrastructure designed to improve personal safety and property security in public places, to provide communities with a safe and secure environment in which to live, and to reduce the incidence of crime in public places.

The concepts underpinning the objectives of the security improvement program are crime prevention through environmental design, which focuses on changing the way that we view both the existing environment and planning for the built environment, and safety audits, which focus on making changes to the existing environment. Both of these concepts are initiatives of the Queensland Police Service and aim to develop a safer community and improved quality of life.

Local governments are encouraged to utilise both of these models in developing their Security Improvement Program funding applications. Improved street and security lighting reduces the fear of crime and reduces opportunities for offending and increases interaction in public places. I think that is very, very important when it comes to these safety issues. Crime prevention through environmental design can improve the public's feeling of confidence and enhance the quality of life of communities. This is one area where local government can play their part in making their busy areas more secure. I encourage councils to take advantage of this opportunity to provide extra lighting and to provide security devices in public areas right throughout the communities.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Community renewal is also following the same path, and I commend the government for that. I refer to page 13 of the MPS, which states that further applications will be invited in 2001-02 under the Local Governing Bodies Capital Works Subsidy Scheme. When will further applications be invited and what are the objectives of this scheme?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Councils can apply for subsidy under the scheme at any time. There is not a specific time when they have to apply. Councils are sent an invitation in November of each year to remind them of the works that are eligible for subsidy and the procedure for applying.

The Local Governing Bodies Capital Works Subsidy Scheme provides financial assistance to local councils towards the capital cost of the creation and upgrading of a range of infrastructure. For example: water infrastructure 40 per cent, sewerage 40 per cent, sewerage effluent reuse 50 per cent, new amenities blocks 20 per cent, libraries 20 per cent, swimming pools 10 per cent, cultural complexes 20 per cent and community facilities 10 per cent. A road and drainage grant is also paid to each council under this scheme. In 2000-01, it totalled \$27.2 million. That infrastructure contributes to public environmental health, as well as community and economic development.

The subsidy for water supply and sewerage infrastructure was increased from 20 per cent to 40 per cent for 10 years in the 1996-97 state budget. The main objective for increasing that rate and also for introducing the 50 per cent effluent reuse subsidy was to reduce the level of nutrients being discharged into waterways. That was introduced and increased for that reason. Under the scheme, a 40 per cent subsidy is payable on the capital costs of the water supply source and treatment and sewerage treatment works approved after 1 July 1996, and a 50 per cent subsidy is now applicable to the additional capital costs to reuse sewerage effluent.

Apart from the road and drainage grant that is based on a formula, there is a demand-driven scheme whereby local governments supply a subsidy towards planned capital works projects. Subsidies are paid as councils construct that work and claim the subsidy. In 2000-01, 153 water and sewerage projects received a 40 per cent subsidy and 30 received a 50 per cent subsidy for the beneficial reuse of sewerage effluent. An additional 350 projects received the subsidies available for other capital works. A further \$27.236 million has been provided to local governments in 2000-01 as grants for road construction. There is a lot of working going on in local governments and they are taking advantage of those subsidies.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Still on page 13, the MPS indicates that further applications will be invited in 2001-02 for the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Technologies Program. When will future applications be invited and can you tell us a bit more about it?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** This follows on from what we have just been talking about. Expressions of interest for a fourth round of the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Technologies Scheme will be called during September 2001—that is only weeks away - with a closing date of 31 January 2002. Allocations from this round are expected to be made in May 2002. In order to maximise the number of quality applications being received, a long lead-up time is required. This will also allow many of the current projects to be completed, freeing up proponents and sponsor council resources to apply under the fourth round for new research projects or extensions of current projects. The timing of the fourth round is consistent with the time interval for previous rounds.

The Advanced Wastewater Treatment Technologies Scheme is a \$7 million program for advanced research projects, pilot plants and the introduction of new technology into Queensland for sewerage treatment. The objective is to introduce improved sewerage treatment technologies into Queensland, resulting in lower costs to the community and improved environmental outcomes.

In the 1996-97 state budget, some \$600 million in water and sewerage subsidies over 10 years was committed to assist local governments, and the Advanced Wastewater Treatment Technologies Scheme was part of that commitment. This subsidy for research and demonstration projects is up to 50 per

cent of the cost with an indicative maximum of \$250,000 per project. That subsidy is helping councils move into the future in a more environmentally conscious way with regards to sewerage effluent.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Page 12 of the MPS states that a statewide survey of urban water and sewerage infrastructure was initiated in 2000-01 to ensure that the highest priority needs are addressed under the Smaller Communities Assistance Program. Could you provide some further details about the survey and the process that is being followed with this project?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Adequate water supply and sewerage disposal are prerequisites for improved public and environmental health, as well as achieving social and economic development. In Queensland urban areas, these services are almost exclusively provided by local government. The state has an interest, however, in seeing that adequate services are available to communities. The survey will report on and document the current status and future needs of urban water supply and sewerage in communities with populations of just over 50 people.

From the perspective of this portfolio, the main use of the survey is to indicate the level of need in small communities and allow consideration of whether additional funds may be warranted to continue a program such as the Smaller Communities Assistance Program that I spoke of before. The survey is being undertaken by Cardno MBK Queensland Pty Ltd. It is being administered by the Department of Natural Resources and Mines under the guidance of a steering committee comprising this department, the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, the Department of Health, the department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development and the Local Government Association of Queensland. A steering committee to guide the project was established and first met in October 1999 to consider draft terms of reference prepared from initial consultations.

Offers to undertake the consultancy were advertised in January and closed on 29 February 2000. Those offers received were evaluated and three short-listed offerers gave a presentation to the steering committee on 20 April 2000. The three short-listed offerers were invited to submit a price for the work by 8 June 2000 and priced offers were received from the three short-listed offerers. The steering committee met to consider those offers on 3 August 2000. The consulting engineering firm of Cardno MBK was appointed to undertake the survey in October.

The cost of that consultancy was \$349,800. A sum of \$202,930 is expected to be paid to the consultants by 30 June 2001, which has just passed. The balance of \$146,870 will be paid in 2001-02. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines will contribute \$200,000 towards the cost of the consultancy and the costs of putting the data into the computerised database.

The consultancy has completed that work and populating the databases and collecting information is in progress. Data gathering from existing total management plans of local government water and sewerage assets and by visitation of local governments is well progressed in these areas.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Page 13, dot point 3, refers to applications being invited for the 2001-02 Showground Subsidy Scheme. Realising the importance of annual shows or exhibitions to many Queensland communities, can you tell us about the Showground Subsidy Scheme and what funds were allocated in the past financial year 2000-01?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Under the Showground Subsidy Scheme, applications are invited in November or December of each year. The scheme provides financial assistance to show societies and local governments towards the cost of capital works undertaken at showgrounds. A subsidy of up to 33.3 per cent is available for public toilet facilities and up to 40 per cent for other capital works under this particular scheme.

If applications for subsidy exceed the funds available, the subsidy on larger projects is reduced to less than that percentage. In 2000-01, \$1,987,920 was allocated to 73 show societies and local governments for 199 projects. That figure comprised the \$1.5 million annual budget allocation plus \$487,920 of the 1998-99 subsidies not utilised at that time by societies. Unused subsidies lapse at the end of the financial year following their approval. The subsidies for December for 2001-02 will be announced shortly and \$1.8 million is expected to be made available for allocation to show societies and local governments throughout Queensland.

This scheme allows for the upgrading of facilities in showgrounds. In most areas of Queensland, shows are a very important part of the community. In a lot of areas, the show societies and the councils are finding it even more difficult to keep up to date the facilities that are provided and not used regularly, but certainly used for shows. It is very important for most communities to have a show and this subsidy scheme allows the upgrading of facilities in showgrounds right throughout Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for government members' questions has expired. I call the member for Warrego.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to your recently enacted Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2001, which requires councillors to vacate office on becoming a candidate for Commonwealth elections. I ask: is your legislation consistent with the requirement of the Commonwealth Electoral Act and section 327 of EARC's report on interference with political liberty, which is described as a basic principle in that report to this parliament? That is the Electoral and Administrative Review Committee Report 1990 that came into this parliament.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Prior to the enactment of the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2001, the Local Government Act 1993 provided that where a councillor nominated for election to the state or Commonwealth parliament, they remained in office during the election campaign and did not vacate their council office unless elected to parliament. Local government electoral arrangements have been largely based on arrangements for state elections.

However, the processes applying to councillors nominating for parliament differed from those applying to members of the legislative assembly nominating for election to the Commonwealth parliament. Under the Australian constitution, members of the legislative assembly are required to resign before nominating for election to the Commonwealth parliament.

This issue of councillors having to resign was raised for public debate in 2000. It was the subject of an editorial in the *Courier-Mail* on 31 May last year. The editorial addressed the arguments for and against councillors having to resign before running for higher office. While it acknowledged that the public is entitled to the best possible pool of candidates at elections, the editorial suggested that this needs to be balanced against the view that the current arrangements encourage nomination without responsibility. That view was put forward in the parliament at that time by the member for Logan.

This issue was formally raised in a discussion paper dealing with a range of electoral issues that was released by the department in June 2000. A total of 74 submissions were received up to the close of submissions in October 2000. Of those, 61 were opposed. All 51 councils that made submissions opposed the proposal. That, of course, means that 74 councils did not even bother to respond, so they certainly were not concerned about it.

However, there was general community support for this move. Of the 22 submissions from respondents other than councils and the Local Government Association of Queensland, 13 were in favour of the proposal and nine were opposed. A number of the submissions supporting the proposal were from individual councillors themselves. This was confirmed by an independent survey of community attitudes to the proposal commissioned by the department and carried out in October 2000 by a professional research firm. Fifty-three per cent of respondents indicated support for the proposal that councillors resign, 35 per cent were opposed and 12 per cent were undecided.

<sup>010</sup> In addition, during debate on the bill a number of speakers from a local government background indicated that they had polled their electorate and there was community support for this amendment. Apart from quoting from the *Courier-Mail* I would like to quote, as I did in the summing up to that bill, a man from the Sunshine Coast who said that it is not the responsibility of ratepayers to provide a fall-back position for councillors wanting to seek higher office.

**Mr HOBBS:** It would appear as if the editorials in the *Courier-Mail* may be directing some of your departmental policy. I do not think that is a really good way to go. As both you and I know, those councils objected. But I did not find one council anywhere in this state that supported it. The only support you got was from the Speaker of the House, one of his staffers and some other government supporters through the party structure. It is not really fair to say that there was support out there. You did not answer the question in relation to consistency with the federal legislation. The act states that a person shall not hinder or interfere with the free exercise or performance by any other person of any political right or duty that is relevant to an election under the act. The penalty is \$1,000. Your legislation is now inconsistent with that act. That is quite clear.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Can you get to the question, please?

**Mr HOBBS:** Bearing those considerations in mind and also EARC's position, do you still believe that your legislation is consistent with the Commonwealth legislation?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I believe if it were not consistent we would have heard something about it by now. Of course it is consistent. What is more, there are councillors—and I am one of them—who have already resigned before standing for state office. I did so voluntarily. I did it because I believed it was the right and proper thing to do. This legislation was introduced and passed by the parliament to bring consistency to the three levels of government. Any councillor who wishes to seek the higher office of mayor has to forgo his position. He cannot hang onto his position as a councillor and run for a higher office. Any member of this parliament who wishes to stand for federal election cannot hold onto the position they have here while they run for office in the Commonwealth parliament.

It stands to reason that there was an anomaly. This has certainly taken that out and made it more consistent. I believe that the public at large, and a lot of councillors, some of whom spoke to me yesterday at Winton at the Local

Government Women's Conference—certainly most of the community—are very supportive of this. In fact, the community at large believed that that was the way it was, anyway. They did not believe that we needed legislation to clarify it. I think it is the right and proper thing to do. When a person, particularly an elected person on a council, advises the public that they are standing for higher office they send a message out to the electorate that they are no longer interested in the position they are in. I think they need to do the right thing and resign and then they can go ahead and pursue any area that they want. But I think they owe it to the ratepayers to do the right thing, resign that position and let somebody else take over in that job while they campaign for a higher office.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to a report that came to this parliament from the Electoral and Administrative Review Commission. It stated that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights states that every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity without any of the distinctions mentioned in Article 2 about unreasonable restrictions to vote and to be elected at genuine periodical elections. That report came to this parliament. It is quite clear that your legislation is in breach of this. We probably did not know this before, but I am telling you today that this has been raised. Would you be prepared to have a look at that and see if your legislation is inconsistent with this report to the parliament?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will take that on notice, because that has little bearing on the budget for this department. I think that what you are saying is not correct, because if it did apply it would apply to any person in this parliament as well who wants to stand. I will take that particular part of your question on notice and we will give you a reply to that.

**Mr HOBBS:** In relation to dot point seven on page 8 of the MPS, I note that you have developed legislation to commercialise the Townsville-Thuringowa water supply board. What assurance can you give ratepayers that the price of water in Townsville and Thuringowa will not increase in the short term as a result of this being signed off?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think I answered that very clearly in the debate in the House. I believe I answered it very clearly. The Thuringowa-Townsville water board has been in existence for a long time. Its primary role is not to set charges for domestic use. Their primary role is to provide water to the Thuringowa and Townsville councils and to some major industrial users. The Thuringowa and Townsville councils will now, as they have done for many years, take that bulk water, reticulate it in their areas and budget accordingly to charge their ratepayers for that water. The legislation before the House on that was really in relation to giving the Townsville-Thuringowa councils the board make-up that they wanted. Previously they had equal numbers from each council on the board and an independent chair. When that was commercialised that was not possible under legislation so that day we changed part of the legislation so that they can now have an independent chair on the board. But the cost of the water to the people of Townsville and Thuringowa still rests with their own councils, not with that board at all.

**Mr HOBBS:** In your answer to my question 3 you stated that the implementation of water pricing reforms is at the discretion of local governments and the expectation is that local governments should not be implementing the reforms unless there is a net public benefit. That was on page 2 of that question. My understanding was that local governments did not have a say in that. At the end of the day, a public benefit

test was done in the overall context. But here you are saying that individual local governments can do a public benefit test. Is that the case?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There has been a lot of misunderstanding on this. I know that a number of councils that are currently moving down the track of introducing two-part tariffs for water supplies in their area have said they are being forced into it by the state government. I thank you for this question. I would like to take the opportunity to clarify that. Under national competition policy all councils whose expenditure for water, or for sewerage for that matter, exceeds a certain level—it was \$5 million a year; I think that is currently being changed a little bit—must implement a public benefit analysis test. But that is all they are required to do. They must do that. They must make it transparent to their ratepayers how much the water is costing and who is paying for it, whether it is being subsidised for certain users or not, whether it be for householders or for industrial use. If it is being subsidised at all, it has to be made transparent. But at that stage that is the end of their requirement under the national competition policy from the state. From there on what they do about charging for water, whether they leave it as it is now, whether they introduce two-part tariffs or whether they commercialise their water supplies, is a council decision.

**Mr HOBBS:** Therefore, those councils that had 1,000 connections and under will not now have to comply as they thought they would. For instance, if Kingaroy does a public benefit test and finds that it does not benefit the public, they do not have to do it; is that what you are saying?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will get you an expanded answer to that from the department. But I do not think Kingaroy would even be required to do the public benefit analysis test, because I doubt if its expenditure is sufficient.

**Mr TUCKER:** In terms of councils which only have up to 1,000 connections, they are encouraged through our financial incentive program—the NCP dollars—to actually look at whether they want to reform their water supply or not. The bottom line, however, is that if the public benefit test comes out and says there is no net benefit, they do not have to do any reforms. In fact, they can have a choice not even to do the public benefit test. But we encourage them, by providing funds, to actually do it.

**Mr HOBBS:** Therefore, they do not have to do it if they see that it is not going to benefit their community?

**Mr TUCKER:** Yes. We are providing funding assistance for them to do those tests to see if it is of benefit to their community.

**Mr HOBBS:** Would that interpretation have been consistent with the other councils that did it before, the larger ones?

**Mr TUCKER:** No, the larger councils—the big 18—were obliged at law to carry out the benefit public assessments. The law said they must do it, but the law did not say that they had to implement the assessment. It still left it up to the council to make the decision once the assessment had been taken whether or not to go ahead and reform water or not.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to dot point 8 on page 8 of the MPS, which notes that you have completed an assessment of issues from the development of legislative proposals from the review of local government revenue powers. What significant changes will be made to the existing revenue powers of local government?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The review is part of the ongoing evaluation of key components of the Local Government Act to ensure that it remains contemporary

and relevant to the needs of local government and the community. The review is also in response to issues raised by the Ombudsman in the course of investigating complaints on how councils exercise their revenue powers. These issues include the need to clarify the power to fix general charges for goods and services and aspects of council rate recovery practices, including the application of legal and administrative costs. An assessment of submissions received in response to a departmental discussion paper has been completed. A report is being prepared now for my consideration on those issues. An evaluation report is expected to be prepared for me by October 2001.

The timing for introducing amendments will be influenced by a range of factors, including the time needed to resolve stakeholder issues with draft legislative proposals. It may be possible to finalise legislation for introduction in early 2002. If this was achieved, councils could operate under the new legislation from the start of the new financial year.

The main issues, though, that were raised that need to be addressed are providing more flexibility for councils in revenue raising, improving transparency and accountability through strengthening the status of a council's revenue policy, providing a more transparent process for the categorisation of land for differential general rating, achieving an appropriate level of complementarity between infrastructure charges under the Integrated Planning Act and special charges and rates under the Local Government Act, enabling councils to charge interest after a court judgment where the council has sought recovery of overdue rates through court action, and allowing a council to terminate the sale of land procedures if part of the overdue rates are paid. These are all issues that are being addressed in that review.

<sup>011</sup> **Mr HOPPER:** As you probably are aware, our Dalby Town Council has 10 bores that supply the town. They were pumping 15 litres a second. They are now down to three litres, which is probably due to the last 12 years of drought. I notice there are four subsidies already available to the council. They may be up for a massive cost in relation to their water supply. If this does happen to be the case, are you willing to show leniency and increase your funding towards that?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I would suggest that the Dalby Town Council puts in a submission to the department, let us see exactly what the problems are and we will certainly consider what can be done to help them.

**Mr HOPPER:** They are really going to head for trouble, I would say.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will certainly have a look at that. But they need to put in a submission to us outlining exactly what the problem is, what needs to be done about it, what the cost factors are and let us have a look at it as a whole.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to dot point seven on page 17 of the MPS which mentions the Gulf Regional Development Plan. I notice that under Regional Achievements you have finalised and obtained an endorsement from cabinet for the Gulf Regional Development Plan. Can you advise the committee what recommendations have been implemented from this report?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That was introduced just recently into the parliament, wasn't it? I think it was tabled in the parliament. The Gulf of Carpentaria region comprises the local government areas of Burke, Carpentaria, Croydon, Etheridge and Mornington shires as well as the Aboriginal community councils of Kowanyama and Doomadgee. The region covers a vast area of north-west

Queensland adjoining the southern waters of the Gulf of Carpentaria and bordering the Northern Territory. So it is covering an enormous area.

The Gulf Regional Development Plan has been prepared under the auspices of a regional planning advisory committee with representatives from all levels of government and key stakeholder groups throughout that region. It has been formally endorsed by the gulf regional community and the state cabinet as the principal strategic framework guiding development and management of the gulf region over the next 20 years. In essence, the plan comprises an integrated series of eight major strategies addressing key issues confronting that region. These strategies deal with native title protocols, environment and natural resources, economic development, employment, education and training, community services and development, infrastructure delivery and transport.

In March 2001 I formally launched the GRDP document. The plan is now in its implementation phase under the direction of the Regional Planning Advisory Committee. The organisational arrangements for implementation have now been put in place, and I expect progress will be made in 2001-02 towards achieving concrete results for the gulf region and its communities. Implementation of the plan will primarily occur through integration of regional planning outcomes into local government planning schemes; works programs and corporate plans; the state agency policy making processes; capital works programs and service delivery; and regional organisations such as gulf development, gulf tourism and regional economic development organisations. So the plan brings all of those organisations together to try to work to a better future for the gulf area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government members' questions has expired.

**Mr CUMMINS:** On page 8 of the MPS, the last dot point reads—

Established an electronic local laws database and internet-based search facility to improve access by local governments and the community to local laws.

Realising that I, too, have come from a local government background and I am well aware of the optimism held towards this initiative, could you please tell us about the database and the cost of its development?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The department developed an Internet web site containing a list of all local laws, including subordinate local laws currently in place throughout the state to improve access for the community, business, local government and state agencies. At present, the content of approximately 99 per cent of all local laws can be searched and viewed online. The Internet site provides a similar service for local laws as exists for state legislation on the Queensland Office of Parliamentary Counsel web site. Access to the information stored on the site is provided free of charge.

A test site went live to local governments and other known local law practitioners on 4 June 2001 so its functionality could be tested and feedback provided. The Internet site went live to the public on 29 June 2001. A limited number of local laws—approximately 50 of the 4,130 laws—have not been provided by council. So users are advised to contact the department or council to obtain a copy. So those very few laws that are not on the web site can be obtained by contacting the department or the council.

Crown Law advice was received on 14 July 2000 as to whether the department can publish the local laws on the Internet without the possibility of a breach of copyright legislation. The advice suggested that each council's permission would

need to be sought before making their laws available on that web site for public access. It is good to know that every local government has signed copyright permission forms, the wording of which was verified by Crown Law. So every council is cooperating with that.

The cost for developing the database and web site was approximately \$24,000. The majority of the cost, \$22,100, was for engaging staff from a temporary recruitment agency to assist in the collection, typing and formatting of the electronic copies of the local laws so they can be stored on that database. A significant number of older local laws were held in paper format only. No electronic copies were available. These had to be scanned and retyped for addition to that database. So a lot of work was involved in that. The balance of the money was needed to obtain the software required to develop and maintain the database and for promotion of the site.

The statutory processes for making local laws and subordinate local laws require local governments which have made, amended or repealed their laws to publish notices in the gazette or local newspaper and to provide copies of the law to the department. Departmental officers will input that information from those gazette notices on the database weekly so that it is kept up to date at all times.

**Mr CUMMINS:** That is interesting. Dot point seven on page 9 of the MPS refers to the introduction of the improved financial reporting arrangements for local governments in 2001-02. Again, I realise that the technical language is often difficult to comprehend. Why do you feel the existing financial reporting arrangements for local governments need improvement, and what changes are proposed?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The existing requirements for financial reporting have statements that go beyond those in the Australian Accounting Standards. They include an appropriation statement, which explains how the surplus generated by a council has been used; a capital funding statement, which shows what money has been raised to fund capital works and how that money had been used; and a statement of comparison with budget, which shows the extent to which the actual financial performance of the council matches up to its original intentions. The Auditor-General and the local government representative associations have expressed the view that these additional statements make the financial reports confusing to councillors, auditors and, of course, the public. I think anybody here who has been on local government would agree that they are confusing.

In his report to parliament, report No. 3, the Auditor-General said that he supports the development of the more concise format for the financial statements, which is more easily understood by councillors and ratepayers whilst still ensuring accountability through providing relevant information to all users. Concern has also been expressed that, whilst statements that meet the requirements of the Australian Accounting Standards are readily understood by accountants, they are not understood by lay readers. Clear communication of council finances underlies effective local democracy. There is, therefore, a need to address those issues.

The following changes are currently proposed: removal of the three additional Queensland statements so that the principal financial report will meet only the requirements of the Australian Accounting Standards; a requirement for councils to include in the annual report a summary of their financial position and performance in a manner and language understandable to their communities; and a requirement to include in the annual report an explanation of the financial report for the year. While the detail of this explanation will be left to councils, it is proposed that certain mandatory questions must be addressed, and that will be done.

The proposal to commence the project and the process to be followed were approved by the local government reform committee in July 2000. That committee includes the department's director-general and general manager of local government services, the executive director of the Local Government Association of Queensland and the state president of the Local Government Managers Australia. Following this, the department established the working group comprising nominees of those associations and the department. This group met on one occasion and agreed to conduct business by email. This is proceeding now. They are working through that. The draft discussion paper is to be presented for consideration in July of 2001.

**Mr CUMMINS:** The dot point under that, the last dot point on page 9 of the MPS, refers to the department supporting local governments in the implementation of NCP and the water pricing reforms. I realise that the shadow minister and member for Warrego has raised this issue and complimented you on your department's process, but could you again touch on what the government is doing to continue to support local governments in implementing the reforms through national competition policy?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There are a number of reforms there that the department is working through. I would like to again stress the moves being made by a lot of councils to go to water meters and to adopting two-part tariffs. In 1997 the Local Government Act was amended in accordance with national competition policy and the Council of Australian Government water reform principles to require local governments with significant water and sewerage business activities—that is, as we heard before, currently the 18 largest local governments—to apply the principle of consumption-based charging for water services and to consider two-part tariff charging arrangements for their water services. These local governments were required to undertake an assessment and prepare a report in order to determine if it would be cost effective to introduce two-part tariffs.

Where an assessment recommends application of a two-part tariff and a council decides not to proceed with the implementation, the council is required by legislation to provide reasons for its decision and carry out a fresh assessment within three years. So they are not required to go ahead and implement; they are required to do another assessment within three years. But it is the council's decision. Amongst other considerations, these assessments take into account costs associated with installing and upgrading water meters as water meters are essential for a two-part water tariff pricing structure. A lot of councils have meters installed; they do not have two-part tariff costing. So they are not really associated.

These are the issues that are coming up with regard to water. The Queensland government's position on applying the national competition policy reforms to local government has always been that they are a set of management tools to choose from if they are going to benefit a council and if there is a positive public outcome from it. Apart from the provision of funds under the \$150 million national competition policy local government financial incentive package, there have been a number of initiatives to support local governments implementing those reforms in recent times.

<sup>012</sup> With regard to COAG water reforms, there have been extensions to the funding deadlines and an increase in funds available from FIP for two-part tariff assessments by small and medium councils; that is, for the assessments so that councils can make those decisions. We have gone through a lot of other processes where the department is assisting councils to implement those reforms.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 2 of the MPS under the heading 'Budget Highlights', the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality is mentioned. What is the action plan and what role will the department play?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think I have answered this one to some extent in relation to a previous question. It is an important issue and I do not mind reinforcing what was said before. That plan is a Commonwealth initiative to improve water quality and reduce the incidence of dryland salinity in at-risk catchments, and that is a serious issue in a lot of areas. The initiative is funded until June 2007. Queensland signed up to the initiative in November 2000 and will match the Commonwealth's \$81 million on a dollar-for-dollar basis. That is a huge commitment by the Commonwealth and the state government to this initiative. The national action plan focuses on four priority regions in Queensland. It has a strong emphasis on community involvement to develop accredited natural resource management plans and investment proposals to fund projects which fulfil the objectives of that plan.

The plan specifically requires that local government be involved in the development and implementation of natural resource management plans. In relation to the role that the department will play in this, the national action plan will have a strong emphasis on the involvement of local government to deliver on priority projects developed by the communities within the regional catchments to improve water quality. To date, most Queensland local governments in the priority regions have viewed that role in water quality matters as minor, but that of course will change with this plan. The department has been funded for three years to build the capacity of local governments to a point where they can actively participate in the process of preparing accredited salinity and water quality plans and develop mechanisms for interpreting the outcomes into their corporate and operational planning schemes. Again, this is just another issue that is going to be reflected in the IPA plans and another reason why it is so important that councils come online and get those plans in place.

The department will be involved in training programs and the development of guidance and advice to local governments on this issue, the same as the department is doing on a number of issues right across the sphere of local government. All of these plans that come forward, all of these reviews, and all of these new ideas and planning processes are all supported very heavily by the Department of Local Government in Queensland. As a result, local government will develop ownership of the actions to be undertaken to improve water quality.

The funding for this program will enable the department initially to build the capacity of the local governments in the four priority regions and then expand that training to local governments Queenslandwide, because this is a big problem in a lot of areas. It is not just confined to a few regions but is widespread. The department is seen as the key link between traditional natural resources management, integrated catchment management organisations and the local government sector. The department is therefore in the best position to train and advise local governments on these matters. The national action plan program is being undertaken in conjunction with the departments of Primary Industries, Natural Resources and Mines and the Environmental Protection Agency. This department has been involved in developing the program at the state level and in consultation exercises with the relevant stakeholders.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Thank you, Minister. I refer to page 8 of the MPS, in particular dot point 4 under the heading 'Recent Achievements'. It indicates that a review of

anticompetitive provisions in the Local Government Act 1993 has been completed. Why was this review undertaken and what is its current status?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Competition Principles Agreement adopted by COAG in April 1995 required the review and, where necessary, the reform of legislation potentially restricting competition. In 1996 all Queensland government departments reviewed their legislation to identify provisions that contained measures that restricted competition. As a result, areas of the Local Government Act 1993 were identified for review under a public benefit assessment. The Local Government Act was found to contain three types of anticompetitive provisions: a statutory monopoly giving exclusive power to local governments to operate ferry services in their area; an outright prohibition on local governments from operating superannuation schemes outside the statutory scheme provided in the LGA for all local government employees; and a business conduct restriction on the operation of two joint local government water supply boards—that is, the Esk-Gatton-Laidley water board and the Caloundra-Maroochy water board.

The review of anticompetitive provisions in the Local Government Act was completed in June 2001. The review involved a major assessment of provisions relating to ferries and a minor assessment of provisions relating to superannuation for local government employees and supply of bulk water by joint local governments. The major assessment was carried out by a specialist consultant, KPMG Consulting. The cost of that consultancy was \$41,500. The minor assessment was carried out within the department. The completed reports from the major and minor assessments are now in the course of being submitted to the Under Treasurer in accordance with the agreed arrangements. Those reports are also being presented formally to state cabinet for noting in due course.

I turn now to the outcomes of that review. The major assessment found that, once the qualitative and quantitative factors were considered, there was no net public benefit from removing the exclusive right of local governments to provide ferry services in their area. The minor assessment found in relation to superannuation that there was no net public benefit from removing the current requirements on local governments in that regard. In relation to the supply of bulk water by joint local governments, the minor assessment found no public benefit in removing the current restrictions preventing the Esk-Gatton-Laidley water board supplying bulk water to customers other than the component local governments. However, the assessment of the Caloundra-Maroochy water board did identify a net public benefit in extending the water board's jurisdiction to sell its spare yield to non-urban bulk water customers in adjoining local government areas. This would enable the board and component councils to benefit from some additional revenue and benefit the region. So these were the issues that came out of that review.

**Ms MOLLOY:** I refer to dot point 5 on page 8 of the MPS under the heading 'Recent Achievements'. It indicates that the department facilitated the coordination of state policies impacting on local government through the work of the Local Government Reform Committee. I ask the minister to tell us about the Local Government Reform Committee and some of the issues it considered.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Local Government Reform Committee was established in 1997 to provide a forum for the state and local government to work in partnership and to facilitate, monitor and advise on state initiatives impacting on local government. The Local Government Reform Committee process also enables the early identification and resolution of any issues of concern and acts as a clearing house for items of common interest. Membership of the Local Government

Reform Committee comprises the president of the Queensland division of Local Government Managers Australia, the director-general of the Department of Local Government and Planning, the general manager of Local Government Services and the executive director of the Local Government Association of Queensland.

The benefits of having this committee in place have been closer collaboration between the state and local government, leading to better design and coordinated state initiatives affecting local government. It also provides an early warning of issues associated with state government decisions, programs or initiatives so that action can be taken to address them before they become too problematic. This informal but effective mechanism leads to more effective policy development. The committee addresses strategic issues in order to facilitate a partnership approach in addressing cross-jurisdictional issues, monitors the local government system, and develops appropriate responses where assistance, guidance and support are required. It also provides a forum for the negotiation of unresolved issues.

In relation to some of the issues impacting on local governments that were considered by that committee, in 2000-01 the committee considered: implementation issues relating to the state's policy on damage to local roads in conjunction with the Department of Main Roads; coordination between the Department of Local Government and Planning, the Department of Innovation and Information Economy, Sport and Recreation Queensland and the LGAQ to address information technology issues regarding local government; the implementation of the state communication and information strategic plan; and the development of a project to simplify and enhance the financial reporting of local governments.

Other issues considered include: mosquito control on unallocated state land; constitutional recognition of local government; Commonwealth financial assistance grants reviews; simplified financial reporting for councils; and development of an integrated regulation project in respect of the IPA and building codes. These are the issues that are being discussed by this committee. It is very valuable to the department to have that sort of interaction. I think it has been very well formed.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Minister, the time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Department of Local Government and Planning has expired. I thank you and your departmental officers for their assistance in this process and those who have attended today. I know it puts a lot of pressure on departmental people, your own office and also the opposition office. On behalf of the committee, I thank you for your attendance here today. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Emergency Services.

Sitting suspended from 11.56 a.m. to 1.00 p.m.

**EMERGENCY SERVICES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. M. F. Reynolds, Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland

Mr M. Kinnane, Director-General

Mr W. Hartley, Chief Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority

Dr G. FitzGerald, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

Mr J. Noye, Executive Director, Counter Disaster and Rescue Services

Ms M. Smith, Executive Director, Support Services Business Unit

Mr G. Taylor, Director, Finance and Asset Services, Support Services Business Unit

Ms F. McKersie, Executive Director, Strategic and Executive Services Division

<sup>013</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** I declare the committee hearing open. The next portfolio to be examined is Emergency Services. Minister, I welcome you and your departmental staff to the hearing. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A warning bell will be given 15 seconds prior to the expiration of these time limits. Any extensions may be given with the consent of the questioner. The estimates committees' process rules require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency 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 brief opening statement?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. The Beattie Labor government has for a second term provided a record budget to support Queensland's emergency services. For the first time, the Emergency Services budget has exceeded half a billion dollars, which is a clear reflection of the importance this government places on protecting Queenslanders. It also highlights the invaluable contribution made by our ambulance, fire, State Emergency Service and counter-disaster and rescue personnel, supported by the extraordinary efforts of thousands of volunteers across the state.

This record \$517.5 million budget will boost all our operational arms and improve service delivery to Queenslanders. In just over three years the Beattie government has increased Emergency Services spending by \$115.4 million. That is a 28 per cent increase in just over three years. We are committed to an effective, dedicated and professional emergency services outfit. As minister, I am proud of the work all our officers carry out seven days a week, 365 days a year. These men and women are on the front line. It is they we call on in times of emergency. They are the best in Australia and are among the best in the world.

This budget enables us to continue to deliver increased services to all Queenslanders, no matter where they live. It includes \$239.4 million for the

Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority, \$235.84 million for the Queensland Ambulance Service and \$42.27 million for the State Emergency Service and counter-disaster and rescue services.

The Queensland Ambulance Service will receive an extra \$20.1 million to maintain its world-class service delivery standards. That means 85 new ambulances, more ambulance stations and better communications, leading to better response times. The QFRA budget will increase by a near \$20 million. That means 108 more urban and rural fire trucks, \$27 million for station building, \$21.9 million for community safety and prevention and a record \$22.3 million for training activities.

The Rural Fire Service will receive \$14.19 million dollars, which includes 58 new rural fire trucks and a new \$2.5 million training package over five years, designed and developed with specific input from our rural volunteers. Rural volunteers will be among the first to take advantage of a new online training program, which will bring training to people. This is new technology which will provide rural and remote volunteers with access to the best and most up-to-date training methods, regardless of their geographic locations. The first trial of this program, which will also involve volunteers from other emergency services, will commence later this year.

The counter-disaster and rescue services budget, which includes the State Emergency Service, will be \$42.27 million. That includes \$4 million over three years to enhance disaster management and mitigation and \$1 million extra for SES and Volunteer Marine Rescue services, including new safety, communications and protective gear.

In addition, this morning I announced a multimillion dollar sponsorship deal with the RACQ to benefit community helicopter rescue services in Rockhampton, Mackay and the Gold Coast and the state government's three bases at Cairns, Townsville and Brisbane. The package will see the RACQ logo featured on the chopper fleet and will provide additional support, on top of existing government funds, to enhance our helicopter services around the state. The \$5 million will be used to upgrade vital life-saving equipment and assist community helicopter providers with operational advice and support.

We are committed to working in partnership with our 85,000-plus volunteers. In this the International Year of the Volunteer, it is only just that I pay tribute to the dedication and professionalism of our volunteers across all emergency service agencies.

This is a budget that will build on Labor's commitment to put Emergency Services on a more financial footing. We want to ensure that Queensland communities get world-class emergency services delivered in the most professional and efficient manner. We are equally committed to ensuring a safer Queensland. Since the Beattie government took office in 1998 we have provided an extra \$115.4 million to emergency services. Response times are better than ever. More Queenslanders now receive an ambulance in less than 10 mins from the time of their call, and we want to better this rate.

In legislative developments, we have passed the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill, designed to further protect people from the threat of chemical hazards and industrial accidents. Those convicted of breaching the laws face penalties of up to three years jail, and a maximum fine of \$1.125 million applies to corporations.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, commissioners, senior staff, director-general, staff from the department and observers: welcome to today's estimates committee hearing. This is your first time, Minister, so we will go steady.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Some of us will.

**Mr MALONE:** I will let your side attack you. I refer to counter-disaster and rescue services mentioned on page 1-11 of the MPS. What is the time frame and budget for completing the Economic Costs of Disasters in Regional Queensland project?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In the five months I have been the minister I have enjoyed the working relationship I have had with the member for Mirani. We are both north Queenslanders. We know that in this area of counter-disaster and rescue services it is probably north Queensland—Mr Chairman, you would appreciate it as well—that is most affected. These are areas that are particularly important to all of us.

My department is currently conducting a project entitled the Economic Costs of Disasters in Regional Queensland. The project aims to develop a methodology for the assessment of the economic impact of disasters in a regional context. It also aims to identify existing techniques and develop new techniques for the assessment of intangible and indirect losses resulting from a disaster.

This project is important because there is currently a shortage of data that can provide a realistic estimate of the costs of disasters in regional areas. With our decentralisation, it is important that we get this information and get it right. The availability of such data will allow for cost-benefit analyses to be conducted, and this will provide all levels of government with the capability to make informed decisions on disaster management funding and other support. The methodology will be tested in the north Queensland region, in particular the Cardwell shire. This region was chosen because of the very frequent flood events in Tully and closures to the Bruce Highway in this area, which are considered to cause a significant economic impact on this region.

The project will be completed in November this year. The total cost of the study is estimated to be \$100,000. The department has provided \$30,000; Emergency Management Australia is contributing \$50,000; the Office of Regional Development, which is part of the Department of State Development, is providing \$10,000; the Department of Main Roads is providing \$5,000; and Queensland Transport is providing \$5,000 towards the project.

My department will also undertake consultation with the major stakeholders, including local governments, state governments, business and industry, on the issue of economic costs of disasters. The Centre for Disaster Studies at James Cook University, with whom we have a very good relationship, will participate in the project by collecting field data according to the requirements of the methodology.

It is a national disgrace that that part of the Bruce Highway between Townsville and Cairns should be so inundated by flooding. It is high time the federal government recognised the social and the economic impact that has on north Queensland people. I say that in terms of canefarmers, the people who live in that area and tourists as well.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer to the sub-output statement on page 1-13. Why is there a decrease in the number of community disaster awareness and education activities conducted during the last financial year?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** As I have indicated, counter-disaster activity is seen to be a key component of the Department of Emergency Services. That is why we have

budgeted this year for \$42 million to be expended in that particular area. In terms of our counter-disaster work, we have a very important relationship with local government and the community. North Queensland is beset by more natural disasters than other areas and it is important that we foster this relationship.

The \$1.4 million disaster mitigation and management initiative is a very important one for the Queensland government. It is part of that \$4 million to be spent over a three-year period. Disaster Management Services' performance in 2000-01 is against established targets, which I will outline. The number of people receiving disaster management training incorporating disaster mitigation concepts has exceeded targets—1,200 to 1,500—with an estimated 1,600 people trained.

An estimated 16 community disaster awareness and education activities were conducted, against a target of 40 to 50. These activities are predominantly supported by the counter-disaster and rescue services' district staff. In 2000-01 these staff increased their commitment to the provision of support to SES. That has reduced the number of larger-scale community disaster awareness and education activities. However, the routine community-based disaster awareness involvement of district staff has continued through media interviews, newspaper articles and brochure distribution.

The disaster mitigation and management initiative will provide an additional \$240,000 in 2001-02 alone toward developing public education and awareness to minimise the impact of disasters. The funding will be used to investigate, improve and assess techniques for best informing particularly vulnerable groups in our community, such as schoolchildren, the elderly and tourists, about coping with disaster impacts. We will also be using that funding to work cooperatively with local government. In fact, we would see the targets we are talking about being set by local government as well. That partnership between local government and state agencies is extraordinarily important in terms of the work we are doing. This disaster mitigation and management initiative funding will enable this target range to be increased to between 40 and 60.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer to the sub-output performance set out on page 1-14. How much funding support was given for 2000-01 and what is the budgeted estimate in 2001-02 for Surf Life Saving Queensland, the Royal Life Saving Society, the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland, the Volunteer Coast Guard, SES Cadets and the Youth Action Program?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I visited the Mackay region just last Wednesday week. I was delighted to be with the member for Mackay, your chair today, to visit the voluntary marine rescue base at Mackay and to acknowledge what a great job that VMR unit at Mackay does.

**Mr MALONE:** It is very impressive.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is very impressive. I then went down to the surf-lifesaving club.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is impressive, too.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That must be the best surf-lifesaving club in Queensland. I have been to a few of them—

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** No. Bribie Island is the best.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I know that the members for Pumicestone, Noosa and Kawana are going to tackle me on that issue, but surf-lifesaving is a great activity.

<sup>014</sup> The department continues to provide substantial funding to Surf Life Saving Queensland and the Royal Life Saving Society to support their vital public safety activities. In 2000-01 the funding to surf-lifesaving was \$2.9 million. This funding will support the operation of 57 surf-lifesaving clubs, six branches and, of course, the state centre. The funding to Surf Life Saving Queensland includes additional recurrent funding of \$450,000, which will support enhanced beach patrols; grants for up to four newly accredited clubs; the common law component, which is a very important component of the workers compensation premiums; and support for education and training programs for both volunteers and the wider community. Funding of \$50,000 will be allocated to the Royal Life Saving Society for the operation of two clubs. The grants for 2001-02 will be much the same as 2000-01.

In the work that we have been doing, I have visited a range of surf-lifesaving and VMR groups. Can I just elaborate in regard to that and say that the estimated funding for this year for Surf Life Saving Queensland will be \$2,979,360; the Royal Life Saving Society, \$50,177; and the Australian Volunteer Coastguard, \$1,041,400. The Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland will also be receiving \$1,041,400.

The SES cadets is a major part of this budget in terms of the work that we are doing right across Queensland. I recognise that if SES is going to perform that invaluable task that they have in the last number of years, we need to ensure that we get the people who are coming behind them. The SES cadets this year will be receiving \$1 million towards their important work.

**Mr MALONE:** The Youth Action Program?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The Youth Action Program is actually within that SES cadets program. That will be provided with that \$1 million support. Would you like a bit more information?

**Mr MALONE:** No, that is fine. Carrying on from there, from my perspective—and I support entirely the SES cadets, as I have indicated all along either in estimates or in the House—it is rather disappointing to see that there is no increase in the SES cadet groups in Queensland. They went from 36 to 37 last year, and the target this year is still only 37. Would you like to comment on that? It seems to me that you are not actually expanding the program. And to me, that is a disappointment.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In terms of the SES cadets program, it was only two weeks ago that I launched a program on Palm Island. I can say to you today as minister that we will be doing all we possibly can to have as many SES cadet units across Queensland. I think we have done pretty well since these have been established. They were established, of course, by former Deputy Premier Tom Burns in 1995. It has expanded to involve more than 1,000 young Queenslanders between the ages of 13 and 16. From 1 July 2001, the eligibility age for involvement in the SES cadets scheme will be extended to 18 years of age. That will give us a bit more room to move in terms of the number of people we can get into the SES cadet schemes and also the number of SES cadet units that we actually have in Queensland, as well.

I think the SES cadet scheme is great for the young people in our communities. The scheme teaches young people skills that will be with them for life, and they have fun in the process. The scheme gives an important sense of belonging. I know it teaches young people to be responsible and assists in the development, I think, of their self-esteem. It is a great SES cadet unit that we have set up at Palm Island—the largest indigenous community in Queensland. I think they are going to

have a ball of fun but, at the same time, provide good backup for the SES there, as well.

By 6 March 2001 the program had expanded to 37 groups across the state. One cadet group had been established this year at Emerald. I should say that the cadet scheme has expanded very successfully in rural areas. The scheme has helped young people grow into community-minded members, with many going on to become adult volunteers in the SES and other emergency services. In terms of the QFRA and the QAS, we have a range of people being involved in those areas of involvement, and we see more young people being involved in 2001-02, backing up those areas of emergency services, as well.

**Mr MALONE:** My comment would be: I am disappointed to see it is still only 37. That is fine. We will work on that, I guess. In relation to the \$1 million extra funding that you have indicated for state emergency services, I have always been concerned that that amount of money is not enough to cover all the issues in terms of volunteers and SES. Minister, could you specify the actual areas that you are spending the funding on in terms of personal protection, exactly what equipment you will be buying for the \$1 million, whether you see that that is covering all the issues that SES groups are bringing forward to you, and whether that will satisfy the demand that exists for clothing and lightweight gear and personal protection?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** As a state government we are committed to ensure that our SES volunteers that are out there—part of that 85,000 volunteer force we have in emergency services—are very well catered for. Over the past five months I have spent a lot of time in rural, remote and provincial Queensland talking to the SES units. I believe that this budget will be very, very important for them in terms of their demands. As you would be aware, this is the second year in a row we have injected this \$1 million into the funding.

**Mr MALONE:** The point of the question is: is it going to be sufficient?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am just about to answer that. The funding will be allocated in the following areas, and I think this will be very sufficient in regard to the SES units that we have out there. Can I give you an idea of the proposed equipment allocations? SES personal protective equipment, which includes overalls, boots, helmets and safety glasses, will benefit SES volunteers statewide at a cost of about \$25,000; provision of warm, wet weather jackets—we have seen a number of people, for example, in the area of the member for Darling Downs. He specifically asked about this. Indeed, he credited the government for those jackets that they are getting. This will be a new item of personal protective equipment for SES volunteers, particularly in those cold climates like the Darling Downs. A variety of jackets will be trialled by SES volunteers before a standing offer arrangement is established. All active volunteers will be supplied with a jacket over the next four to five years.

In 2001-02 the funding available will benefit something like 2,500 volunteers—provision of new communications equipment to 11 SES groups that currently do not have the necessary communications equipment required; the provision of five new repeaters at Theodore, Jericho, Noosa, Tin Can Bay and Mount Glorious; and replacement of 64 mobiles for SES groups in the north, far north, Mackay, Capricorn and Darling Downs districts. You can see that, in terms of communication, we see that as being absolutely pivotal in terms of the work that the SES groups are doing. The purchase of 25 replacement repeaters throughout the 12 districts—these repeaters will be placed within the most highly populated areas of each district. In total, 49 SES groups will benefit from the issue of new and replacement communications equipment.

I also indicate that safety at height equipment required to comply with current workplace health and safety requirements where SES members are required to work at heights—this equipment will benefit 180 SES groups, that is, up to about 5,400 volunteers who will have access to these kits. There are mandatory requirements for issue, including safety lines, belts, harnesses, slings, karabiners, maillons and fall arrest devices. So we can see there about \$530,000 in terms of that equipment. There would also be a range of very important ongoing support.

This year we have an additional funding allocation from the 2000-01 budget—\$170,000 is allowed for remaining back orders for overalls to be completed and the establishment of a recommended stockholding level, as well. So we are doing all we can in this area.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Minister, I will start by saying that although my mother was a Townsville girl, I do not believe I am part of a cliquy north Queensland bond that you might share with the shadow Minister for Emergency Services and even the Chairman. So we are not going to go easy on you on this side. On page 2-9, in the second dot point, emergency prevention education is recognised as a major responsibility for the Queensland Ambulance Service. How has the QAS contributed to prevention education within our communities in the past financial year 2000-01?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the honourable member for Kawana for that question. Of course, I would like to say that, as the member knows, we have discussed Townsville and his mother's heritage in Townsville on a number of occasions. He also knows—as do the members for Noosa and Pumicestone—that, in the last five months, I have made about four regional visits to the Sunshine Coast, and that is really indicative of the major growth occurring on the coast and the major need for the members of that area and the minister to be well aware of the needs. I would like to congratulate the members from the Sunshine Coast in that regard.

QAS community education provides the most diverse and complete package of nationally accredited commercial first aid, cardiopulmonary and injury prevention training courses available. These courses better prepare the community through education and respond appropriately to incidents of sudden illness and injury pending the arrival of an ambulance. The QAS has played the lead role in the development and funding of the CPR 2000 project in association with the Australian Resuscitation Council of Queensland and, of course, Queensland Health. The QAS is continually developing user-friendly modalities for first aid training, such as self-paced packages available as hard copy or on the Internet.

In terms of some of the key strategies that we are putting in place—first of all, first aid and resuscitation training—QAS offers a range of commercial first aid and resuscitation courses. QAS has 14 first aid courses that are nationally accredited, and QAS maintains registered provider status for each of them. The senior first aid course is also accredited in New South Wales through New South Wales WorkCover. In the last financial year, the revenue from those courses was \$3.814 million. I am very pleased to say today that 53,550 certificates were issued, which I think is a greater number for Queensland.

We also, in terms of strategies, have the injury prevention course. QAS also offers commercially a range of injury prevention courses designed to educate specific community groups on injury prevention techniques. These include One Step Ahead, FarmSafe and Older and Wiser. The other strategy, in terms of ambulance community education and services—known as the ACES system—this system was formerly known as the community education management system,

called CEMS. I can indicate today that the access system is a computer-based system designed to manage and administer the delivery of community education courses. In all of this work that we are doing, the Queensland Ambulance Service is strategically working on that prevention side. We know that the dollars we are spending in preventive health areas are going to be saving this state and the government and the community dollars in the future in terms of corrective health measures.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Over the page on 2-10 there is the 'Output: Ambulance Community and Business Services'. Under the quality point it refers to providing essential services within our communities. Customer satisfaction is often realised as a good measure of you and your department's performance. How does the QAS rate amongst its customers and users?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In the last two weeks the commissioner for ambulance, Dr Gerry FitzGerald, and I have of course been touring Queensland, including the areas many of you represent, celebrating 10 years of the Ambulance Service. One of the things that both Dr FitzGerald and I have been very proud to be able to indicate is the high level of satisfaction amongst our customers or our clientele in this patient satisfaction area.

I can report today to the estimates committee that patient satisfaction has continued to remain extremely high. Utilising the results from the Queensland household survey, the QAS had 92.7 per cent of respondents indicate that they were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the services provided by the QAS. The dissatisfaction rate was only 1.7 per cent. Community education continues, of course, as a major thrust of the QAS to better prepare the community to respond to sudden illness and injury.

<sup>015</sup> I know that during the 1999-2000 year the QAS community education program issued a record number of community education certificates. There was about an 11.4 per cent increase over the 1998-99 total. It does allow people out there in the community to understand the very important role that they have to play but also to be able to understand the pre-hospital care that is given by our ambos right the way across Queensland.

Can I say that, in terms of the patient satisfaction area, we want to ensure that we have a very good line of communication. That is why we actually go out there and survey. As Dr FitzGerald has been saying across Queensland just over the past 14 days, the survey that we have had—the latest survey that we had—was about 97.3 per cent. Indeed, the dissatisfaction rate was less than the level of error that you would get on that sort of survey as well. So we believe that the people of Queensland, in terms of the work that we are doing in Ambulance Services, recognise the number of new ambulance stations, they recognise the new ambulance service providers—the paramedics that we have out there—and also, of course, they recognise the fact that we have been working extraordinarily hard to ensure that response times are as low as they possibly can be.

Can I say that, as a Labor government, we have been overwhelmingly responsible for the modernisation of the Ambulance Service throughout the 1990s. I think that the people of Queensland can see that that last 10 years has been extraordinarily beneficial. The old QATBs did a great job in this state. The QAS has centralised and modernised the service and we see it today in our satisfaction rate.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Just a bit further on response times—you touched on it then and you also touched on response rates in your lead-in. On page 2-4, the second

bottom dot point refers to the utilising of technology and communications as being attributes to any modern service. How has the Queensland Ambulance Service utilised modern, available technology in its provision of a timely service to people across Queensland?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I did indicate that in this area of communication it is vitally important that the Queensland Ambulance Service keep up with and, in fact, lead in terms of the technology that is required to have the best possible response times and, of course, making sure that in that pre-hospital care we can indeed save lives. Of course, that is what ambulance officers do 365 days of the year, seven days a week, 24 hours a day. The QAS operates 10 communications centres throughout Queensland, including AFCOM. A number of small ambulance stations in remote areas continue to dispatch their own vehicles. But over the past two years the QAS has embarked on a major upgrade of communications centres involving the rebuilding of most centres, the upgrading of education of communication officers and the introduction of important new technology and procedures.

Many people, particularly in rural areas, continue to have problems with the 000 system, particularly as Telstra has continued to centralise their call centres. This system of communications centres allows specialist operators to receive calls through assistance and dispatch responses. QAS communications officers continue to provide advice to the patient or bystanders while paramedics respond. New communications centres have now been built at nine of the existing communications sites.

The new regional computer-aided dispatch system, or CAD as we know it, has now been implemented. The advanced medical priority dispatch system, a computerised system that guides communications officers through the right questions to ask the caller, has been integrated into all CAD systems and is in use. Some of you would know, from your visits to the older stations, of the old card system. We have been able to replace that with our CAD computer-aided dispatch. The CAD system replaces the manual card systems that I have just described and will streamline operations.

In addition, the new system provides much valuable information on patient needs to guide future planning. An implementation of the regional CAD program will cost \$5.84 million over five years. The member for Kawana, of course, remembers that he and I quite expertly laid two bricks at the Maroochydore station. I am saying that with a bit of jovialness, because I am not too sure whether the member for Kawana gave us the right instructions in regard to how they were to be laid. But, indeed, we have paved the way there certainly in regard to a great communications centre for the Maroochydore area.

Also in regard to automatic vehicle location—AVL—and mobile data, the AVL project is well under way and proceeding to plan. The AVL will assist communications officers in identifying the nearest vehicle to dispatch—the location of vehicles identified by the use of a global positioning system. These new strides in technology are excellent for our Ambulance Service.

**Mr CUMMINS:** On page 1-4 of your MPS the first dot point refers to counter disaster rescue services—CDRS—including the State Emergency Service. Unfortunately, we realise that disasters are a common occurrence across Queensland. What are you and your department doing to prepare communities for what some consider to be the inevitable?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say that the state government in Queensland, I believe, is leading the way. Indeed, I would congratulate the Director-General, Michael Kinnane, and the director of the CDRS, Jack Noye, on the work that we have been able to put into this area over the past couple of years. In fact, we are leading the way in terms of pressing the federal government to look at disaster management and mitigation as a major initiative. What we spend now in mitigation is very important in terms of the small number of dollars that we will spend in terms of correction.

The state government, through this budget, will invest an extra \$1.4 million in disaster planning and community awareness campaigns in 2001-02. This is the first instalment of a \$4 million commitment over three years to assist in minimising the impact that disasters have on Queensland communities. We promised this in going into the February election and we are delivering it in this first budget. The 2001-02 \$1.4 million allocation will be used in a number of different ways, including increased regional staffing, public education and awareness campaigns and initiatives, increased training and development, various disaster mitigation projects, support to the state mitigation committee and disaster preparedness exercises and planning for CHOGM and the Goodwill Games.

We will be spending \$660,000 a year for the state disaster management and mitigation framework to increase its resources and improve the knowledge and skill levels of staff involved in disaster mitigation. This funding will be used to increase the departmental district officers' capacity to support local governments in conducting natural disaster risk management studies throughout Queensland. That partnership we have in terms of mitigation again is extraordinarily important with local government and those local communities. We are actually enhancing the support that we give to our state government areas and also, of course, to local government.

An amount of \$240,000 will go towards developing public education awareness to minimise the impact of disasters. The funding will be used to investigate, improve and assess techniques for best informing particularly the vulnerable groups in our community, such as schoolchildren, the elderly and tourists, about coping with disaster impacts. We will also be working very cooperatively, as I have indicated, with local governments, state governments and other organisations to raise the level of disaster awareness and, of course, the preparedness of communities in general.

An amount of \$200,000 has also been allocated to training and development for state agencies, local governments and counter disaster and rescue services staff. In a disaster situation, the Department of Emergency Services has the leading role and a principal part of that role involves that very important area of coordination.

Can I say that effective disaster response requires that coordination across state government departments including Health, Main Roads, Transport, Primary Industries, Police, Family Services, Premier's and Treasury. It also involves a very important liaison with local government and also with community agencies like the Red Cross and the Salvation Army.

**Ms MOLLOY:** I refer to page 1-15, the fourth last dot point. Additional funding of \$1 million was provided in 2000-01 for personal protective equipment and support for our volunteers, including the State Emergency Service. Will this additional funding continue in 2001-02?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes. Can I say in response to the question asked by the member for Noosa that I am delighted to reiterate once again that that \$1 million will again be allocated in this 2000-01 year. The \$1 million funding for volunteer support will, of course, go over a range of areas that I was elaborating on just a little while ago. It is important to say that, in terms of the SES groups that we have in Queensland, each of them requires this support that we are giving from the state government level.

I know that about four or five years ago the government of the day wanted to pass all of the SES across to local government. I do not think that is the policy of the opposition today, but it was in those days. I think that would be an extraordinarily retrograde step, because I know that the support that the SES gets from the state government is very, very important.

What I would say is that, in terms of the SES volunteers statewide, they will be receiving a range of very important equipment. I would just like to elaborate on the ongoing support that we are going to be giving as well. The ongoing support is in the areas like full-time operations and training officers. I am pleased to be able to confirm that the work that we are doing at Longreach, for example, including all operational and administrative costs that are associated with that, will be supported once again this year. The ongoing lease of the vehicles for the operational use of training officers located at Beenleigh and Gympie will continue. The very important initiative—the part-time ATSI training officer appointed in 2000-01 to support the Cape York and Cairns area—will be continued as part of that dual thrust that we are working on with the indigenous communities in regard to getting more indigenous volunteers and people working in those emergency services areas, including the SES but also, of course, making sure that those indigenous communities are targeted in regard to the service delivery component as well. There will again this year be ongoing counselling support for SES volunteers who have suffered emotional trauma as a result of their operational duties. An amount of \$40,000 was spent last year and I would see a similar amount being spent this year.

We need to recognise that the volunteers in the SES are again those front-line volunteers. They need our support. We need to care for the carers, and that caring for the carers is a very important component of this budget.

We will also be giving important ongoing support to the VMR Association and also the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard groups to purchase common law liability insurance cover for their crews. That is costing about \$60,000 over the year.

This is very, very important work that we are doing. The ATSI training officer, I should say, that I mentioned in terms of the part-time component that we have, will indeed become a full-time position this year. That shows our priority in terms of those communities.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions from government members has expired.

**Mr MALONE:** In relation to Queensland rescue helicopters, page 1-17 and also the answer to question on notice No. 8 indicate that there has been an increase in maintenance costs from 1.37 to 2.58—almost a 90 per cent increase in maintenance costs, and I assume that that is from currency fluctuations with the importation of parts and the increased costs of fuel. Have you taken a brief to Treasury in regard to increasing funding for the community helicopter providers along the same lines? The point is, of course, that the government helicopters have

blown out their budgets fairly considerably and yet the community helicopter providers have to basically do with what they have had over the past few years.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much. That is an important question that the member for Mirani asks, and can I thank him for that question. The estimated actual 2000-01 operating result for the CDRS indicates a deficit of \$146,000. We have had abnormal unforeseen expenditure specifically within Aviation Services that has contributed to that deficit. The main factors attributed to this deficit are first of all, following the loss of the Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service on 24 July 2000—the tragic Marlborough accident where lives were lost—the Department of Emergency Services deployed the Queensland government helicopter rescue service, the Squirrel helicopter, to Rockhampton to provide aeromedical and air rescue services. The total cost of this support to CHRS was \$74,254.

Aviation Services is currently supporting CHRS, as you would be aware, following a further accident on 28 April this year. The Squirrel helicopter was deployed to Rockhampton on 8 May and will remain in service until a replacement helicopter becomes available. In discussions this morning with CHRS, we think that will be on about 27 July.

<sup>016</sup> The cost of this support was estimated at something like \$12,000 per week; that is approximately \$90,000 until the end of the 2000-01 financial year. As at 30 June, \$284,000 in additional fuel costs have been incurred due to fluctuations in the Australian dollar. We have that concern in a range of areas, but in this area it is a concern. Helicopter maintenance costs for 2000-01 were \$479,000 over budget primarily due to fluctuations in the Australian dollar. Partially offsetting those expenditure pressures have been a higher receipt of user charges relating to aeromedical retrievals for the New South Wales Department of Health.

In terms of the community helicopter providers, we have received a proposal from the community helicopter providers for increased funding. That will be considered and discussed within the government. We will be looking at that in terms of our mid-year budget review. I am indicating that to those providers. That did come in after the budget was being considered. They all know that we will now be looking at that in terms of our mid-year budget review.

As I have indicated earlier, this morning we heard a very good announcement from the RACQ which amounts to a \$5 million sponsorship for three of those community helicopter providers and also the government providers who operate on a statewide basis. If you would like to give me more time, I can elaborate.

**Mr MALONE:** Okay. Specifically on the new agreements that you are going to sign, are you going to increase the benchmark and then have a rise-and-fall clause that will provide for currency fluctuations and fuel pricing as part of that?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Each of the community helicopter providers is, of course, funded through a service agreement. In discussions that we have had with all of the community helicopter providers, we are ensuring that the service agreement we have is the most rigorous agreement that we can have in terms of standards, safety and training. In discussion with those helicopter providers, particularly in Mackay and Rockhampton, we are looking towards a partnership with the government providers and those community service helicopter providers to ensure that our service agreements are the best we possibly can have for the public of Queensland. The service agreements have now been extended to 30 September. We will see new agreements coming in on 1 October this year. They will be looking at the types of provisions I have just been indicating. In terms of funding, we will be looking at

that in the mid-year review, that is, late this year, and certainly that will be taken into account as well.

I will indicate to the estimates committee the very important announcements that have been made in regard to the increases that we are going to have in this area as well. This budget builds on the government's commitment to provide world-class emergency services in this area. An initial \$1.55 million has been provided to the department to enhance emergency helicopter services through upgraded maintenance and crewing. A sum of \$0.7 million has been allocated for the maintenance of the Queensland rescue helicopters at Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. A sum of \$0.845 million has been allocated to establish an ongoing aeromedical and air rescue helicopter service at Bundaberg to service the Wide Bay-Burnett region. A trial service had been provided, as you would be aware, from Bundaberg by the Sunshine Coast Helicopter Rescue Service. That has been very much welcomed in the Bundaberg-Wide Bay area—the upgrading of that helicopter—and also the assurance by the government that that will be an ongoing commitment over the next five years.

In our discussions with the community helicopter providers, we are ensuring that we look at the funds that are required. In terms of that rise and fall that you have indicated, that is something that we will be looking at in terms of their submission. The department has also facilitated, for those community helicopter providers, access to the government's standing offer arrangement for fuel. That has been beneficial as well. It enables the community providers to purchase fuel at the government contract rate, which helps in reducing the impact of high fuel costs.

**Mr MALONE:** On page 1-18 you talk about aviation safety audits for community helicopter providers. My understanding would be that the service contracts that you have signed with the providers would indicate that they themselves would have to undertake safety audits as part and parcel of that service contract. Can you indicate to me which service providers have completed those safety audits and which have not?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is an area which, of course, comes under the control of the federal government as well. The federal government has a very responsible role to play in ensuring that community helicopters overall, whether we are looking at community helicopter providers or fixed-wing planes such as the member for Warrego flies around in from time to time, meet the requirements of the federal government. That is an operational question. I will ask the director of CDRS to answer.

**Mr MALONE:** Can I clarify: I am talking about the service contract that the Queensland Government has with the providers.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am aware of that.

**Mr MALONE:** Part of that is to have a safety audit.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will make some comments and the director of CDRS may like to make some comments as well. The proposed draft service agreements will incorporate new standards for permanent, temporary, casual and part-time pilots, including 100 hours night flying experience. They will also incorporate a requirement for initial and currency training for pilots and crew members to meet DES standards. They will incorporate a requirement for the providers to provide DES with details of the qualifications and experience of all pilots and crew members, and of pilot and crewing arrangements. A requirement will also be made for aviation safety audits to be carried out at least once every 12 months.

**Mr MALONE:** Is that not the case now?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will ask the director of CDRS to expand on that. It will also have a requirement for CHPs to subject themselves to regular audits of patient transport appropriateness, clinical appropriateness and response according to guidelines and processes approved by the Queensland Emergency Medical System Advisory Committee or its derivatives. I will hand over to Jack Noye, who will expand on that.

**Mr NOYE:** The current and the extended service agreements do not require the community providers to undertake the safety audits. The new ones that we are negotiating with them will. The providers that have undertaken safety audits are CareFlight on the Gold Coast and the Mackay service. Aviation safety is a federal government responsibility. We are on new ground here. We will be also talking to the Civil Aviation Safety Authority about this. The negotiations under the new agreements will require that there be an annual safety audit, but that is not in the current arrangement.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The director-general would like to make a comment as well.

**Mr KINNANE:** I would like to add a point to Mr Noye's comment. I certainly reassure the committee that with the operation of all of these community-based helicopter providers, they very much operate consistently with the requirements of CASA. Their operating licenses and so on are checked by CASA and that provides for the basis of their ongoing operation.

Particularly as a result of the tragic instances over the last 12 months, we have been working very closely with the community providers to strengthen the service level agreements that will complement the requirements of federal authorities. To date we have had tremendous cooperation with each of those community providers. As has been mentioned by the minister and Mr Noye this afternoon, it is expected that the new service agreements incorporating those additional requirements and for which the government's Queensland rescue helicopter service will play a major overseeing and coordinating role will be finalised by the end of September.

**Mr MALONE:** Just to clarify that a little further, you are saying that they are flying under CASA's rules, yet in the new service agreement are you providing for them to do their own assessments or will the government do the audits? Who will pay for the audits for those service providers?

**Mr KINNANE:** The point that I want to emphasise is that we are providing now minimum safety requirements consistent with the requirements of federal authorities. What we want to do in a, frankly, very tangible way is to strengthen the service agreement relationship that the government has with these providers. We have, in fact, been approached by the Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service in recent times. When the minister visited Rockhampton only several weeks ago, he was approached by them seeking a greater role by Queensland Rescue.

We would see Queensland Rescue, with the support of the community providers, playing a much more monitoring and overseeing role, although not in terms of a Big Brother role. Because the role that Queensland Rescue plays is so strongly supported by the community providers, we see it playing a greater role in ensuring community safety.

The other point, as you well know Mr Malone, is that we have many emergency services personnel flying on these operations. We want to ensure that these operations are the safest possible. We are very confident that we will have that

reconfirmed through an even stronger relationship with the community providers in the future.

**Mr MALONE:** Referring to the sub-output statement headed 'Chemical Hazards and Emergency Management Information and Advisory Services' on page 1-21 of the MPS, could you explain why there is a decrease in the actual state contribution in 2000-01 in light of the fact that, as I understand the latest legislation that has gone through the House, there will be an increased role for that organisation?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Certainly in terms of the new Dangerous Goods Safety Management Bill, as you would recognise and, indeed, indicated to the House when the legislation was being debated, this has an enormous impact in regard to ensuring that we do not have the same type of instances or circumstances that have occurred in other states of Australia. One thing we did agree on in the House that particular day is that the management of dangerous goods is something that has been worked on over a 10-year period. I give credit to both Labor governments and coalition governments that have been working on this area.

The total cost is anticipated to decrease by \$0.386 million from \$2.497 million in 2000-01 to \$2.11 million. That figure of \$2.11 million is an estimated actual figure. The 2000-01 estimated actual expenditure is primarily due to the deferral to 2001-02 of \$0.256 million associated with the implementation of the dangerous goods legislation due to the delay of its enactment in 2000-01. Delayed enactments of the Dangerous Goods Management Bill in 2000-01 has delayed that expenditure.

The total cost is expected to increase by \$0.363 million from \$2.11 million to \$2.474 million. That is our target for 2001-02. The higher level of 2001-02 expenditure results from the carry forward of 2000-01 funds, that \$0.256 million that I have just mentioned, associated with the implementation of the dangerous goods legislation.

We are now looking forward to later this year when, with the community and industry, we actually launch the various aspects of this bill. It is an important bill and it is one that we want to make absolutely sure of in terms of its enactment across Queensland. As I indicated in the House, when you look at the types of disasters that can occur in these areas, it does require legislation at a state level that will deliver in so many different ways. We are looking at people's lives that are at risk. As minister, I want to ensure that our legislation is top class. I believe we have top-class legislation now in Queensland.

**Mr MALONE:** In regard to the 'Counter Disaster and Rescue Services' capital acquisition statement at page 1-23 of the MPS, could you provide an explanation as to why the IT enhancement project, which cost \$2.6 million—

**Mr REYNOLDS:** What was the reference?

**Mr MALONE:** The IT enhancement program, which cost \$2.6 million. I do not see that in the budgeted items for 2000-01. It has obviously come in as an extra somewhere along the track.

<sup>017</sup> **Mr REYNOLDS:** I will ask Margaret Smith to answer that question for us.

**Ms SMITH:** In the past we have charged for IT infrastructure. We have charged on a user pays basis. However, during this budgetary period, because we have rolled out our information technology infrastructure and interconnected 597 stations throughout the state and have given them either via wide area network connection or dial in connection access to a number of our department-wide computer systems and email networks, we have negotiated with fire, ambulance and CDRS that we would move from what was a very administratively complex process of user pays to

actually now moving that funding of approximately \$2.8 million into the recurrent budget of the information services area, which would also allow us to maintain full-time support staff to ensure the stability of the computer network across the state. That only happened last budgetary period, but it will now be an ongoing expenditure.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government questioning has expired.

**Ms MOLLOY:** I refer the minister to the first dot point on page 1-5. Will the minister detail for the committee the role played by the Department of Emergency Services in responding to the Council of Australian Governments' agenda for disaster mitigation?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** On 8 June 2001, COAG—the Council of Australian Governments—agreed to commission a wide-ranging review of how Australia deals with natural disasters. Across the nation, the economic cost of natural disasters averages over \$1.1 billion annually. On this occasion I pay tribute to the role that the Premier of Queensland, Peter Beattie, has played not only on a state level but on the national stage in terms of this very important area of natural disaster relief arrangements. As the Premier is very much aware, Queensland has the highest share of natural disaster recovery and the most natural disasters, due to our climatic and other conditions.

The COAG review will examine arrangements for natural disaster relief and community recovery, gaps in disaster insurance—an area about which every members here today would know something; it is an area that our constituents remind us of and are very concerned about in times of disasters. It will also examine disaster mitigation programs and Australia's capacity to respond to such emergencies.

The proposed terms of reference for the Australiawide review include the identification of objectives of disaster relief arrangements, a review of current disaster mitigation programs and arrangements, a review of current policy-making machinery in relation to disaster relief, mitigation contingency planning and emergency management, including response in the first instance to a disaster, and options for improving upon existing arrangements where appropriate. All jurisdictions and, importantly, the Australian Local Government Association, will take part in the review. This is an area which involves federal, state and local government and communities in terms of the work that we are doing.

Mr Ken Matthews, Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Transport and Regional Services, will chair the review. The Director-General of the department will represent the Queensland government on the review. Can I indicate that the Director-General was in Canberra yesterday attending the first meeting of that review. He will be reporting to me about that meeting over the next few days.

The Director-General of the Department of Emergency Services, as I say, is our representative on that review. The high-level group conducting the review is to report to COAG out of session by mid 2002. Through this review, governments will jointly assess the effectiveness of programs to reduce the risks associated with disasters and to help communities manage, respond and recover from them. In doing so, the review will identify options for improving on existing arrangements.

**Ms MOLLOY:** The second dot point on page 3-6 addresses targeting those at risk. Road accidents and their associated tragedy are an unfortunate part of our lives. Motor vehicle insurance companies target 18 to 25 year olds as an at-risk

category. What is your department doing to contribute to help reduce deaths and injuries among our young people?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is a very important question, especially for those of us who have children in that 18 to 25 year old age group, given that they are targeted as the most at risk category. Today I indicate that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority recognises the need to actively address the issue of motor vehicle accidents involving young adults. The costs to society, family groups and individuals in both a financial and personal sense from such preventable accidents are considerable and often continue for long periods of time.

The Road Awareness and Accident Prevention, or RAAP, program is a statewide initiative of the QFRA targeting year 12 students—those students who are just about to get into a car, get their licence and be out on the roads. The RAAP program is designed to reinforce in young drivers the need to apply concentration, commonsense and a sense of responsibility when driving on Queensland roads. The program is delivered regionally by both on duty and off duty firefighters. The RAAP program is a stand-alone prevention program for use solely by the QFRA. It is currently operating throughout Queensland with 20,534 students participating in the program during 2000-01. This achieves the stated target of 45 per cent to 55 per cent of year 12 students for the year. That is a pretty good coverage. We would like more. A similar number of participants is expected in the 2001-02 year. We will keep on marketing that and getting the maximum number of students involved.

An initial application of the program to Aboriginal communities in far-north Queensland was undertaken in May this year. The RAAP coordinator will work closely with key members of those communities before delivering an agreed format to the young people of the community. Can I say today that considerable interest in the RAAP program has been generated within other fire services across Australia. Other Australian states have expressed considerable interest in adoption of the RAAP program, with the Victorian Country Fire Authority and the State Emergency Services of Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory already committed to its implementation. New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia are expressing a strong interest at this time. International inquiries have also been received from Scotland and South Africa.

Insurance companies are increasing the costs of insurance for young people in this at-risk category. Our state and international barriers make no difference. This is an international phenomenon and it is a phenomenon across Australia. Those people in the 18 to 25 year age group are the ones most at risk. I commend the firefighters involved in this RAAP program. It is very important for the young people of Queensland and I am very supportive of this program.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Thank you for that initiative. The second line item on page 3-17 relates to the Fire and Rescue Training Academy. How will this facility make our communities safer?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Again, can I say that the QFRA academy at Whyte Island is of international standard. The QFRA's new training academy commenced limited operations in September 2000 and is regarded as the most advanced facility of its type in the southern hemisphere. We can be very proud as a state government and as a department that that is the case. The project commenced in 1998. It will cost \$12.4 million to implement to June 2002. The academy is built on two sites totalling 7.8 hectares of land. The main campus incorporates a purpose-built education centre, a vertical rescue and confined space training facility, and streetscape and buildings for practical training in firefighting and rescue.

The second site features a live training facility for use by QFRA staff and other organisations requiring practical firefighter training. This site is essentially completed, with a number of courses already conducted. The final commissioning is planned for later this year. There are a number of simulators already on site designed to provide realistic training and the development of practical firefighting skills. The current training props include simulators representing processes within the petroleum industry, a service station with loading facilities for both liquid fuels and LPG gas, flashover and back draft simulators, flammable liquid and gas simulators. A unique research building has also been constructed on this site to allow the QFRA and other organisations to research and analyse fire and product behaviour.

I would also like to indicate to the committee today that some of the world's leading commercial training companies have expressed a desire to provide training courses at the academy specialising in the petroleum industry and to fire safety and emergency groups from around the Pacific and also the Asia area. The academy is also being used as the base for the expansion of the QFRA's professional development of its staff through the development of new training courses and career development programs. A \$1.1 million package of new initiative programs for 2001-02 includes environmental management and information technology strategies to support the development of these new programs, including the practical training required, to provide a total staff development package. Other initiatives include a new proposal for the development of a technical rescue training cell and simulations for live fire training.

You can see that the Whyte Island facility will be greatly beneficial to the QFRA. Can I also indicate, though, that the staff in the QAS and also SES people will have use of that Whyte Island facility as well. This is a great facility at Whyte Island and I am sure that it will stand us in good stead for many, many years to come.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I draw your attention to the first dot point on page 3-4. Emergency prevention education plays a major role in the protection of our families and homes against fire. How has the QFRA contributed to emergency prevention education within our communities during 2000-01?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In terms of community fire safety education, we deal with fire safety community education by way of partnerships. That development of partnerships in the community is extraordinarily important. As I go through these you will see the important partnerships that have been initiated. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority continues its strong commitment to community fire safety education. These activities are increasingly conducted in collaboration and partnership with divisions of the Department of Emergency Services, the Queensland Ambulance Service and other state government or local government agencies, interstate agencies and also community groups. Can I give you an idea of some of those partnerships? The first is the national seniors association, Sixties and Better, the Retired Firefighters Association and the work that is done in the Seniors Fire Ed program, a very important community fire safety education program.

In terms of the partnership with Education Queensland, as I have indicated to you today, the Fire Ed and Road Awareness and Accident Prevention Program—the RAAP Program—and also our Fire Ed program for young people at school are very important. We have a partnership with the Department of Families through the Fight Fire Fascination program. Young children can be fascinated with fire. Through this program we aim to make sure that they know the harm that can occur if a fire is lit and gets out of control.

Our partnership with the Queensland Electrical Education Council and the Electrical Development Association of Queensland resulted in the introduction of our smoke alarm brochure. That brochure has been extraordinarily successful in making sure that the community is very much aware of the need to have smoke alarms in houses. It aims to ensure that that awareness increases across Queensland. It also aims to make sure that people know that they need to replace the batteries in smoke alarms. I do not say that in any jovial way. That is a critical area of need. We also have to make sure that elderly people can be helped to change those batteries.

Our partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines has produced our Energex safety shuttle. Our partnership with the Fire Protection Association of Australia involves the conduct of Fire Awareness Week. That is a very important part of it. The Safety in Residential Dwellings Task Force of the Department of Health in collaboration with Neighbourhood Watch and the Property Owners Association of Queensland and the Real Estate Institute of Queensland has assisted in the development of a CD-ROM called *Smoke alarms save lives*. These are very important partnerships and in terms of community fire safety education they are vital.

**Q18 Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** You have touched on this very briefly before. What is your department doing to improve indigenous Australian representation in its employment ranks?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In terms of indigenous service delivery, I indicate today that we have a dual strategy. It is about increasing the indigenous service delivery, particularly in the deed of grant in trust communities, ensuring that we have an increase in the number of indigenous people employed in those communities across our department and each of the areas of the department, and also ensuring that they have a valuable role to play as volunteers. The department, through the strategic and executive services, has appointed a senior project officer for a period of 12 months to develop a five-year service delivery plan for the provision of emergency and disaster services to indigenous Australian communities in rural and remote communities.

Yesterday there was an article in the *Courier-Mail* headed 'Kids fired up to follow their dreams'. The caption states, 'Burning ambition ... Norm Clarke celebrates NAIDOC Week with budding firefighters Sharlitar, 5, and Sarius Lomas, 8.' It depicts very much the program that we are working through. The purpose is to enhance emergency service delivery to indigenous Australian communities, ensuring that services are culturally appropriate and with positive outcomes that lead to an improved quality of life on those communities. The cost of that initiative will be \$150,000 over the next 12 months.

The senior project officer will be working closely with the Indigenous Australians Reference Group, which advises the department on service delivery issues and also the implementation of the Strategic Plan for Employment of Indigenous Australians 2000-01. The reference group was established earlier this year and held its first meeting in Brisbane in March 2001.

As minister, I say today that I am extraordinarily proud of the work that this department does in its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy. Indeed, I believe that I can say with a great deal of assurance that we are one of the leaders in government. We are one of the leaders in government in terms of the strategy. It is about not only employing people but also ensuring that we have the service delivery in those indigenous communities as well. In many cases those

things go together. If one goes to an indigenous community like Palm Island, one understands that it is not just about flying people in and having non-indigenous people involved in these services; it is about capacity building. It is about, in a purposeful way, ensuring that indigenous people are involved.

The ATSI employment strategy has a number of corporate achievements that have been put into place. First of all, there is the establishment of the state Indigenous Australians Reference Group, which I have mentioned, which incorporates service delivery as well as employment issues. There is the establishment of five pilot local support network groups at Yarrabah, Cherbourg, Murgon, Townsville, Burdekin, Mackay, Bowen and Brisbane, and in early July I was very pleased to go with departmental staff to the Townsville-Burdekin network group starting in Townsville. Further, there is the development and production of the Strategic Plan for Employment of Indigenous Australians 2000-01.

Expenditure across the portfolio on the indigenous Australian employment strategy for 2000-01 was approximately \$277,900 from the department, \$116,000 from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and \$130,000 from the Queensland Ambulance Service. We will be working very hard on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment strategy. This was one of our key objectives. I congratulate the director-general and his staff on an excellent program. We will see it go into the future this year again.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for government questions has expired.

**Mr MALONE:** We have a real problem here. If we do not fire this up shortly you will have a lot of highly paid executives behind you going to sleep.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is certainly up to you as well, Mr Malone.

**Mr MALONE:** On page 2-3 of the MPS the QAS budget for staffing shows an increase of only one staff member in the area of corporate service. In your reply to a question on notice in April this year you said that there were then 22 QAS employees on stress leave, and that as at 31 December, 414 QAS employees were absent from their duties for other reasons. I ask: how can an increase of one employee overcome the staff shortage you have in the QAS?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Mirani for that question. Indeed, implicit in your question is a need that you have expressed for the other ambulance staff. It is with a great deal of pride that I say that over the last three years there has been a very significant increase in staff numbers within the Queensland Ambulance Service—indeed, over 150 additional operational positions. This budget does not include additional staff as the QAS is continuing to monitor the exact impact of the health funds' competition on its revenue streams. It would not be wise to commit to additional staff until future funding is assured. We will continue to monitor the situation and it may be possible to reconsider the situation at the mid-year review.

We should not be confusing the number of staff that we have with the stress-related issues that you have actually brought up. As I have indicated in the parliament to you, if you look at the number of staff in the QAS who are on stress leave one can easily determine that, as a percentage of our total staff, if we benchmark that with the other states of Australia and, indeed, internationally, we have one of the lowest levels of staff on sick leave. I am quite pleased about that.

**Mr MALONE:** Who are on stress leave.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Who are on stress leave. That does not in any way understate the work that we are doing through the Queensland Ambulance Service to ensure that we help the QAS paramedics and officers who may be affected by stress and

trauma. In fact, that is why we have a priority 1 service here in the Ambulance Service that is second to none.

**Mr MALONE:** That is your opinion.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In terms of the stress leave inquiries, as you have indicated, there were 22 claims that were related to stress leave. In terms of—

**Mr MALONE:** A lot of other officers have resigned or left the service because of it.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Our total staffing has been bumped up in the last three years with the 150 additional operational positions. We believe the budget that we have set down is able to give us the response times, will let us do the excellent work that we have done, and will keep our priority response times where they are. I will now hand over to Dr Gerry FitzGerald, who may wish to make some comments in this area as well.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** The comment that I would like to make relates to the filling of our current establishment. While there are some vacancies in rural areas, those positions are actually filled by people, whether they are people on rotation who travel out there or local people who are filling them as a casual or temporary appointment. Across the state we are actually fairly close to full establishment. At this point we do have sufficient numbers for our existing establishment. I can only reiterate what the minister has said. Obviously we are concerned about the impact of the health funds on our subscription income. So we have not felt it wise at this stage to put on additional staff until such time as we are clear as to what impact that is going to have.

**Mr MALONE:** You are talking about QAS income. What impact has the offer of free ambulance services to pensioners had on the income to the QAS?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Before answering that, I say that, as you would be aware, in 1998 the Beattie government committed itself to ensuring that we had free ambulances—

**Mr MALONE:** I am supportive of that.

**Mr REYNOLDS:**—for senior citizens in this state. That, of course, is a very, very important commitment of this government. That is why we have kept it in our budget this year. I know that in the past the coalition has not supported this.

**Mr MALONE:** I have always supported it.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am not saying that you have not. I am saying that it certainly was not a commitment that you took to the election in 1998. It was an initiative of this government. I do not say that with any disrespect. I am saying this is an initiative of this government.

For sure, it is going to cost the state government money to finance that commitment. But it is a commitment of which we are very, very proud. In every one of our electorates including, I am sure, your electorate of Mirani, there are senior citizens who have a great deal of pride in the service that they are getting. The very fact that we are saying that the seniors are able to get this for free is an indication, I think, of our social policy response for seniors. I will hand over to the director of the QAS and he will give you an idea in regard to that particular question as well.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** I think there are two elements to your question. One is related to what impact pensioners may have had in terms of demand as a result of the change. We predicted that there would be a slight increase in demand in non-urgent services as a result of making it free, as people who had otherwise chosen to

use alternative means or not travel by ambulance now get access to the free service. In retrospect, there has been very little objective impact in service demand. There are always anecdotal cases of people who feel they have misused the service as a result of it becoming free, but objectively there is little evidence to support that.

The second aspect is financing. When this policy was introduced we were provided with the replacement funding from the Consolidated Fund for funds that we would have lost as a result of pensioners no longer being subscribers. That funding was in excess of the funding that we lost and that funding has been ongoing. There has been no separate financial impact to the service or to its other funding bases in a net way from the introduction of free services to pensioners.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will reiterate some of the points that have been made and say clearly that the ambulance service receives \$25 million a year from the revenue stream. So it is not impacting in terms of the operational work that we are doing.

**Mr MALONE:** The comment I was trying to make is that the community service obligation of the free pensioner service was fully covered and that money passed on to the QAS.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is fully covered.

**Mr MALONE:** That is probably better phrased in that way. In regard to the conversion of ambulance vehicles in Victoria by Billrich, can you give me an indication of the number of vehicles that were converted and over what period? I think you have indicated that some vehicles have now been taken off the road. Can you expand on that a little bit?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Before handing over to the commissioner, as I have indicated over the last few days, our bottom line objective is to have safe and reliable ambulances for the people of Queensland. I can give that undertaking once again today. There has not been any time when that has not been the case. There has been no danger to Queenslanders. Indeed, that will continue to be the case. I will hand over now to the commissioner.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** There have been a number of vehicles in the past that have been converted by the same company, but because they were a different model there have been no ongoing problems with those vehicles in the past. About two years ago we ordered 68 of the few new F Series vehicles. They came in two groups. In fact, a group of 34 was ordered and then a subsequent group of 34. These vehicles come from the United States as left-hand drive vehicles and were converted to right-hand drive by a Melbourne firm. That company used to be known as Billrich. That company went into voluntary administration at the end of the last year and has been replaced by a company called the Vehicle Development Corporation.

<sup>019</sup> Because of problems we were having with the delivery of these vehicles following the change of company ownership, we cancelled the order for the second 34 of these cab chassis and finally took delivery of 34 converted cab chassis vehicles. Five of those vehicles are still undergoing fitout of the patient compartment at Superior Bodyworks, so they are not on the road. Four of those vehicles were actually converted on subcontract to VDC by another company using a different methodology. So they are not subject to the issue that we are concerned with.

We were also recently advised by a former employee of VDC that there were some elements of the conversion that were, in that person's opinion, undertaken by unqualified personnel. We had started to investigate that issue when a subsequent

and unrelated issue occurred, that is, the steering actually broke on one of the vehicles. The vehicle was examined immediately by our technical personnel, who were concerned that the reason that it broke was a design flaw. We reported that to the federal authorities. There are about 100 of these vehicles in Australia converted by this company, of which I think about 40 have been converted into ambulances. Some 34 of them are ours and the rest are South Australian ambulances. At the moment it is all being examined by an automotive engineer. We anticipate that as soon as a design correction can be identified those vehicles will return to operational use.

**Mr MALONE:** Supplementary to that, were those vehicles checked as they came into Queensland in that they complied with Queensland law? Carrying on from that, obviously now there is a problem with around about 30 vehicles. Who is going to pick up the cost for that, because the company which did the conversion is now in liquidation? Is this going to be a cost to QAS?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will hand that over again to Commissioner FitzGerald.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** There are two elements to this. With respect to the delivery of the vehicles when they first came, we had considerable drama earlier in the year in getting these vehicles to meet Australian design standards. Part of the process to meet the Federal Office of Road Safety's satisfaction was that each of the vehicles was examined by an automotive engineer in Queensland. Unfortunately, the particular issue was part of the construction and would not have been visible without actually physically dismantling the vehicle. So unfortunately that was not picked up at that time.

With respect to the liability of the company, in fact the Vehicle Development Corporation is still in operation. Billrich is now out of action. It is an extant company, although we understand it is not doing any business at the moment. So we will obviously be seeking whatever redress we can against that company for the costs. You will understand that we have little confidence in its ability to fix this issue itself. We will be making sure that independent analysis and independent design work is undertaken to ensure that the fix is safe.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I understand that the problem was with the pitman arm on the vehicles. I am sure that there are other vehicles out there with similar sorts of modifications. Can you reassure this committee that full accountability is taken for all those vehicles that have been converted by Billrich?

**Dr FITZGERALD:** I must admit that I do not know the technical description, but we understand that previous vehicles do not have this design flaw. Effectively, the design flaw is that on full lock the steering knocks into the chassis causing stress. The other vehicles do not have it, nor do the four vehicles, we understand, that were made by the subcontractor. In relation to the solutions that we are looking at currently, one is an alternative design and the other is to import the parts directly from the right-hand drive manufacturer.

You may be aware that the Ford Motor Company has indicated that it will import cars direct with right-hand drive as of the middle of this calendar year. We are about to place orders for delivery for this financial year's supply directly from Ford Motor Company. We hope that either by designing appropriate parts or obtaining Ford parts directly that this design fault will be overcome. In relation to the other vehicles on the road, we are quite confident because there is no evidence that they share this problem. Obviously they have all been looked at.

**Mr MALONE:** I take your assurance on that. I am concerned that the problem will not manifest itself on the road. Rather, it becomes a problem in parking or tight turning. I take on board your assurances. Hopefully you will make sure that the other 68 vehicles in the fleet which were converted there are fully checked. Minister, with the growing demand on QAS staff for community services such as education and attending sporting games and some officers doing these duties on their days off, what steps is the department taking to alleviate these problems, particularly in rural areas? In those areas officers in charge are quite often on call weeks at a time or are the officer in charge of a station for weeks at a time. This is one of the issues that has been highlighted in the union survey, which I am sure you are aware of.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Mirani for that question. As you would be aware, over the last five months I have travelled extensively into rural and remote areas of Queensland meeting with paramedics and officers of the individual ambulance stations. As minister I want to ensure that I hear the concerns they have with regard to their work in a rural and remote area. Together with the police, teachers, health workers and nurses, the Queensland Ambulance Service has the same concern about making sure that we can get permanent rural and remote staff. In terms of what you are saying, I recently visited and opened the Cunnamulla Ambulance Station. I spoke with two of the staff there. They indicated to me some of the concerns that you are raising today. It is important to say that some of the people we get out in these rural and remote areas do an absolutely splendid job.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** They are part of the community and work in that ambulance station environment. We have a range of strategies, and I have had discussions with the Ambulance Commissioner and the director-general about this. I am determined as minister to ensure that we do all we possibly can for those people in rural and remote areas. I would like to see us have an examination of this across the state. In QAS some of the strategies we are looking at in terms of attracting and retaining officers in isolated, remote and rural locations includes developing comprehensive and standardised community profiles that are based on collated station survey information. In terms of incentives, we are looking at the revision and expansion of the locality allowance payable to QAS staff, the introduction of a new and more equitable accommodation subsidy scheme based on location and the average local rental market, and the introduction of a refund of expenses associated with the sale and purchase of a residence or land. That is quite often an issue that people have to tackle after they leave that particular community.

I have asked the QAS director to look at particular strategies that allow staff to be involved in professional development courses away from the area. In some areas we are looking at online courses that they can do in their own communities. Some of our strategies include the revision and expansion of the service points policy based on an officer's location and their period of service, with the accumulated points assisting an applicant in securing a subsequent transfer. Also, staff within rural and remote areas will retain access to the category of three days paid special leave for staff development purposes. The existing arrangement for airfares will continue for staff in category 7 stations. This is an area that we think is important and one we are examining at this particular time.

**Mr MALONE:** What money is in the budget for counselling services for QAS this financial year?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** As I indicated earlier, QAS counselling services are critical to the work we do. In terms of our Priority One Program, this year's allocation in the

budget is \$360,000. The program has a coordinator of staff support services and an administration officer. The program also provides resources to assist regional management teams in a variety of issues relating to personnel. I should say that in 2000-01 approximately 480 personnel sought counselling either directly or via the 24-hour telephone counselling service. This included QAS administration staff and, in some instances, partners of QAS personnel as well. An average of two debriefings per month occurred throughout Queensland following unpleasant or distressing events in which ambulance and other emergency service personnel were involved.

I can assure the member for Mirani and shadow minister, as I have in the parliament, that I share his concerns in this area. We need to work with ambulance officers in a very empathetic way—and I have said that in the parliament—and a compassionate way. In relation to the stress and trauma that carers go through, we want to make absolutely sure that we do absolutely all we can to work with them to overcome that stress and trauma. I believe that the Priority One Program is a very good program. It has been benchmarked internationally. Other people have looked at this program. I think it is a very good one. We are allocating that money in this financial year for the program.

**Mr MALONE:** With regard to the Childers backpacker hostel fire and the establishment of the Building Fire Safety Task Force mentioned at page 3-1 of the MPS, what is the budget for the task force and the implementation of these programs?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for that question. As the member would be aware, I attended the Childers memorial service just a few weeks ago. I say to members at the estimates committee today that the tragedy that occurred on 26 June 2000 when 15 people lost their lives was indeed a major tragedy for Queensland. As a state government, it really behoves us to ensure that through our Childers task force we can put in place arrangements that are able to deal very compatibly with industry whilst at the same time ensure that people in backpacker hostels and low-budget accommodation are able to be catered for. The task force prepared the report that went to cabinet last year. The report made 12 recommendations directed at improving general fire safety. In terms of the actual task force and the work we are doing, on 8 June 2001 a regulatory impact statement, or RIS, evaluated the cost and social implications of fire safety improvements in budget accommodation buildings. We released that RIS for 50 days for public comment.

The RIS evaluates five building fire safety upgrade options and three ongoing compliance options. The RIS estimates the cost impact at between \$13 million and \$230 million, depending on the option chosen. I have indicated that we also need to be aware that the social impact includes the potential for increased homelessness of vulnerable budget accommodation occupants if standards are raised to unaffordable levels. Whatever we do over the next few months needs to balance between that very important fire safety standard and the needs of people in low-cost accommodation as well. I call on the Chief Commissioner to also make some comments in that regard.

**Mr HARTLEY:** In relation to the task force budget, funding has been provided for the continuation of the task force with three full-time staff right through this financial year. The task force was also funded in last year's budget. The initiatives which will be undertaken by the task force will be the outcomes of the regulatory impact statement and what will come from the community and stakeholders in the

industry. We will continue to work through the implementation of that, but those three full-time staff members will continue on that task force until we undertake those sorts of legislative reviews or the initiatives which will come out of the regulatory impact statement and the impact on the organisation.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions from non-government members has expired.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, you mentioned earlier that the QAS recently celebrated 10 years of service. Could you detail the major achievements of the QAS in those 10 years?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I can outline those with a great deal of pleasure. As I indicated, the commissioner of the QAS, Dr FitzGerald, and I have attended a range of receptions or congratulatory parties with the staff of the QAS. When we look at the last 10 years we see enormous changes. It is important to say that the decision in 1991 to form the QAS came out of a joint parliamentary select committee inquiry into ambulance services. That parliamentary select committee recommended the formation of a single statewide ambulance service to replace the 96 Queensland ambulance transport brigades. I compliment today the members of that parliamentary select committee for its bipartisan support. I am sure that members in certain areas were subject to a great deal of lobbying to not go forward but stay where we were.

The QATB, as it was in decades past, had a very important historical role to play in the 109 years of ambulance services that Queensland has received. The report made a number of recommendations, of which 79 have been fully or partly implemented. Only three of the recommendations have not been proceeded with. As I said before, the result has been a massive modernisation and upgrading program which has transformed the QAS into a world-class ambulance service. QAS staff are now trained to the highest standards, and the equipment and procedures available to care for patients is amongst the best anywhere in the world.

Let us look at this in terms of pre-hospital care. Back in 1991 the QAS introduced an associate diploma course for entry to the Ambulance Service. In 1995 we saw the introduction of a course for intensive care paramedics. In 1996 that was upgraded to a diploma course. We now have a Diploma in Health Sciences at the Queensland University of Technology. Eighty-eight staff are now involved in either the first or the second year of that program. By the end of this year we will have seen the first degree graduates. I think some of the greatest things we have seen are an increase in the level of skills and capacity to work, more ambulance stations, more ambulance officers and better communication. These are some of the great attributes of the QAS over the last 10 years.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, I draw your attention to page 2-6, under the heading 'Quality'. Continuous quality improvements are essential in any service. What benchmarks does the QAS have to measure its quality improvements?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Whether we are looking at private or public bodies, quality assurance is most important in 2001. I am proud to say today that the QAS continues a quality improvement journey utilising the Australian business excellence framework. The QAS has been engaged in a continuous quality improvement approach to all aspects of its operations since 1997. This is a two-phase process.

Phase 1 of this process is the systematic application of total quality management across all aspects of service delivery through the use of the Australian

business excellence framework, a world-class business improvement model. Following large-scale organisational self-assessments in 1998 and 1999 and an independent evaluation, the QAS received the Progress Towards Business Excellence Australian Quality Award in 1999. I am sure that the commissioner, who is here with us today, is very proud of that award. This major award was made by the Australian Quality Council, which is the federal government's peak body for quality management. It reflects significant improvements, measured across all seven categories of the Australian business excellence framework.

The third organisational self-assessment in 2000 indicated even further improvement across the board, demonstrating that the QAS approach to continuous quality improvement is working very, very effectively. Following the fourth assessment this year, QAS will submit evidence of further improvement to the Australian Quality Council for consideration for a higher level award. Such an award will place the QAS amongst the best performing organisations—I am very proud to say in both private and public organisations- in Australia. We often hear that myth about public organisations not being as good as private organisations. The QAS, a public organisation, is proud to have received that award. Of course, it will be proud to be within that range next time.

Phase 2 of the QAS long-term quality process involves seeking accreditation by the Australian Council on Health Care Standards. We are looking at launching this phase in or after 2002. The benchmarks that we use for quality are in the area of cardiac arrest outcomes. We have seen a great improvement in pre-hospital care in regard to the number of people who have had a cardiac arrest and who have actually been saved. There have been great improvements in response times and in terms of satisfaction of patients.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Minister, while thus far nothing seems to have noticeably raised your heart rate, I refer you to page 2-5. Can you comment on any improvements or actions that have been taken to improve survival rates for cardiac arrest patients transported to hospitals?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is a very important question. I touched on this a little while ago. In terms of improved patient outcomes, one of the principal performance measures for ambulance services relates to patients who had the misfortune to suffer a cardiac arrest outside of the hospital environment. A cardiac arrest is what happens when the heart stops suddenly, resulting in sudden loss of consciousness. Untreated, these patients all die. Over the last 20 years it has been demonstrated that the availability of portable defibrillators and cardiac pulmonary resuscitation, or CPR, will enable some of these patients to be revived. When this was first measured in Queensland 15 years ago, only one per cent of the patients could be revived. That figure is a bit stark—only one per cent.

The QAS, with the assistance of the local ambulance committees, has undertaken a major program to put defibrillators in all first-response ambulances throughout Queensland and have trained staff in their use. In addition, the QAS has introduced intensive care paramedics, who are authorised to administer additional life-saving measures. The QAS, together with the Queensland branch of the Australian Resuscitation Council, has launched a program called CPR 2000 to encourage more Queenslanders to learn CPR.

The result of these initiatives has been demonstrated by comparative research conducted in 1995 and 1999, which shows that the number of survivors has almost doubled from 42 to 80 per annum. Initial data from Queensland Health indicates that there has been an increase in the survival rate for out-of-hospital cardiac arrest

from 5.5 per cent to six per cent. Although the research is incomplete, this demonstrates more than anything else the benefits that have been derived from the investments made by successive governments in the modernisation and upgrading of ambulance services in Queensland. That is why the Ambulance Service has seen a funding increase in the last three years before this budget of \$54.5 million. With this budget, there will be an increase of \$20.1 million. Overall, that is a \$74.6 million increase in just over three years. It is that type of benchmarking and those types of results that improve the work of the ambulance officers who try so very hard in their upskilling to ensure that we have the sorts of outcomes that we see today. I have discussed this with some of the intensive care paramedics and they have said that they find that course very beneficial to the work they are doing, particularly in the area of cardiac arrest.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Thank you, Minister. With respect, you forgot to mention that we did it without Kerry Packer's help.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** We did, of course. I will say that. That is right.

**Mr CUMMINS:** I refer to the second last paragraph on page 3-16, which refers to fire vehicles. Firefighter capability can either be enhanced or restricted depending upon the equipment supplied. Minister, could you please comment on the age and suitability of the urban fire and rescue vehicles within your department?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The QFRA has seen enormous improvements in regard to response times, the building of fire stations and the number of firefighters we have recruited. We operate a fleet of 456 urban fire and rescue vehicles of various types. Asset management policies have been adopted for the replacement of pumper appliances at 15 years, aerial appliances at 20 years and support vehicles at 10 years. To support the replacement of vehicles, the QFRA uses a seven-year appliance replacement program that is periodically reviewed.

During 2000-01, the QFRA monitored a trial of six prototype urban pumper medium appliances based on three Scania commercial cab chassis and three American La France Eagles. The trials were conducted over an extended period in different locations. In fact, I was out at the Chermside station yesterday looking at one of the prototypes we have there. They are a tremendous vehicle and they are acknowledged by urban firefighters as having the capacity and the space to carry equipment. The progressive modernisation of what we see there is amazing.

As a result of the success of the trials, a production run of urban pumper medium appliances will be undertaken in 2001-02. The QFRA will also be developing two prototype urban pumper light appliances. QFRA is planning to deliver 43 vehicles in 2001-02. All new urban pumper medium appliances are being fitted with hydraulic road accident rescue equipment, or what we know as the jaws of life, at an average price of \$42,669 per kit. If members have not seen a jaws of life demonstration, they should look at the excellent way in which our firefighters actually do the job. This kit is regularly updated following improvement suggestions from operational staff.

The QFRA delivered 40 urban vehicles in 2000-01. Several appliances were delivered right across the state. In late May we also took delivery of a 37-metre aerial appliance that we ordered in 1999. In conjunction with operational fire staff, the Technical Services Unit is developing operational support vehicles, including a hazmat vehicle, to support major fire incidents and events such as CHOGM. This is a very important part of our firefighting equipment. Since the commencement of the

plan, the percentage of appliances over five years of age has reduced from 47 per cent to 28 per cent as at 30 June 2001.

**Mr CUMMINS:** As a fireman's son, I am quite impressed by your knowledge, Minister. I refer to the last dot point on page 3-5. It is commonly reported that some young people in our communities constantly and deliberately light fires. Could you please inform the committee of the measures undertaken to divert some of those young people who do light fires, although they may be a minority amongst the youth? What are we doing to stop them from becoming offenders and help them not to re-offend into the future?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In answering that question I will talk about the modification of fire-setting behaviour by children. Juvenile fire setting has been identified as a significant cause of structural fires and a major cause—I underline 'major cause'—of bush and grass fires in Queensland. Each year over 100 children appear before Queensland courts on charges of arson.

The Fight Fire Fascination program that I mentioned earlier is designed to provide an intervention strategy for use with at-risk children to modify their behaviour to achieve a reduction in the incidence of fires started by children and young people. This is done with the support of the young person's family and of course the general community. Firefighters receive accredited training to work with children and teenagers. They are doing a great job in this regard. The preventive work firefighters are doing is an extraordinarily important component of their work.

The program is undertaken in homes with the support and participation of the parents or guardians. The aim is to develop an awareness of fire safety, of the social and economic consequences and of the trauma that can be caused by uncontrolled fires.

<sup>021</sup> The program is delivered on a regional basis. Since its inception, more than 300 children have completed the program across the state. A recent independent survey of a sample group of participant families indicated a 97 per cent satisfaction rate with the program and its outcomes. Of this sample group, 95 per cent believed that there had been a very positive behavioural change in their child.

The scope of the Fight Fire Fascination program is being extended through the development of the Juvenile Arson Offenders Program. This program is a strategy that targets older youths who have been through the courts system. Indeed, the idea of the Juvenile Arson Offenders Program is to divert youths from engaging in fire-setting activities. The strategy is to educate individual youths about the dangers and, indeed, the legal consequences of fire setting, including the personal and financial costs related to arson. The program is directed at young offenders facing detention as a result of arson offences that have been committed. On a case-by-case basis, magistrates may require participation in, and successful completion of, the program as an alternative to incarceration. I think this is a very good alternative that we have here. The program provides a more positive and constructive response to correct the offenders' behaviour than would be available just through incarceration. Why incarcerate people sometimes to learn other ways in which to light fires? Why do we not get them into a program and show them, through behaviour modification, the way that we can lessen their actual intent?

**Mr CUMMINS:** The next question I have refers to 3-7—the first point under 'Quality'. We all realise how vitally important smoke alarms are in saving lives. Could you please inform the committee how the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority is promoting the use and installation of smoke alarms across the state?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am very pleased to be able to answer the question from the member for Kawana. I would underline that our officers and crews in the firefighting business today are not just out there fighting fires; they are out there in terms of preventing the ways that fires start. We provide a range of home fire safety advice and service visits. Our involvement is in the delivery of fire safety programs targeting the homes of Queenslanders. For example, with Operation Safe Home, firefighters visit a household to conduct a fire safety audit, to assist with the development of an evacuation plan and to provide advice about a range of home safety issues. This activity is free of charge and is initiated by the householder calling a free call number—1800 815 080. For the period to the end of March 2001, the QFRA had received 1,164 requests and has completed its response to 867 of these.

Another program we have is Smoke Alarms Save Lives. This has been developed as a CD-ROM, and the CD-ROM which has been developed provides information about smoke alarm installation, with particular reference to circumstances encountered in the rental property market. The Safety in Residential Dwellings Task Force consulted with a number of industry and community bodies, including the Property Owners Association of Queensland, the Real Estate Institute of Queensland and Neighbourhood Watch, and worked in collaboration with QFRA to develop the CD presentation. Some 6,000 CDs have been distributed and responses have been very positive.

Another program is Smoke Out Australia. This program is a partnership between QFRA, RACQ, GIO and Rotary to have smoke alarms installed in the homes of our senior citizens. As a result of this program, more than 10,000 smoke alarms have been installed in homes throughout the state that would otherwise have been unprotected.

I stress today that fire safety advice supporting home safety issues is also provided through the implementation of other programs, including Fire Ed, Seniors Fire Ed and Fight Fire Fascination programs, which I have mentioned. These programs may be delivered in a range of forums and are related to safety in the home. In some instances, a home visit may occur as a result of these programs.

One thing I can say today is that firefighters, I believe, are very enthused about being involved in these types of programs. Rather than just being out in that important way of fighting fires, they can see real benefit to the people of Queensland in trying to prevent fires actually occurring, and I believe this is a very, very important part of their job today.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for government members' questions has expired.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I would like to explore a little further the issue of the ambulance vehicles. I refer to a transcript of a radio interview with an ambulance officer. It supports some of the calls I have received that the recalled vehicles are F350 vehicles, and there are still vehicles in the 250 range that were converted and are still in service. I have had the opportunity of speaking to an accredited conversion expert who indicates to me that he has inspected one of the ambulances still in service and they do certainly have that problem. I just need to make the minister aware that I believe there are some issues still current. I understand that you have taken 25 vehicles off the road and replaced them with other vehicles. Where would those replacement vehicles come from? Are those vehicles the ones that have in excess of 300,000 kilometres on the clock? Maybe I can leave it at that and let you explain from there.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will hand over to Dr FitzGerald to elaborate on that for you.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** The current vehicles that are concerned are, I understand, 250s. The 350s are the ones that we are purchasing this year. The technical advice we have is that the previous model did not have this problem. But obviously, as indicated before, we will ensure that those vehicles are double-checked.

With respect to the replacement of the existing vehicles, we have managed to ensure there is no impact on service delivery by obviously getting out the other vehicles that have recently been commissioned, which includes some four-wheel drive vehicles, et cetera. They are the new ones that are coming through as well, so those vehicles have got out there quickly. The other side is to retain vehicles that were due to be decommissioned. I cannot give you the information as to whether they were ones that had excessive mileage, but they were certainly due to be decommissioned. We hope it is only for an extension of two to three weeks. Those vehicles are all, as far as we are aware, safe and have been deemed safe by the relevant technicians. We certainly would not put anybody at risk by having unsafe vehicles on the road.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, it is obviously of concern to myself and to others that there was a group of vehicles—as you would be well aware—that sat at Kedron for a long period because they did not conform to Australian design rules and that there was not a more thorough inspection by yourself or the government in terms of many other areas in respect of the total conversion to comply with Australian design rules and why that was not picked up at the time.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** All I can say is that they were examined by the relevant technicians and engineers at the time, including an automotive engineer. The particular issue that has broken at the moment—there are a number of problems that we have had with these vehicles, including some wiring problems, which of course are issues that have occurred behind the construction that has been put in place. So they are not things—apart from taking the vehicles apart—you would have probably picked up on an external examination. They were examined for the relevant issues that were required to bring them up to meet Australian design standards at the time. All we can say is that this issue was not detected. I have seen the particular part, and probably you would understand better than I do exactly what that part is. It was certainly part of a ball joint and in a fitting, and it would not have been obvious without taking that fitting apart to see that level of stress.

**Mr MALONE:** The reason that part is breaking is because of the extra stress put on it by the bad design of the Pitman arm, which is creating extra pressure on that internal part.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** The best description I can give is that on full lock it hits the chassis. And as a result of that, when the vehicle is on full lock, it has been causing stress on the particular joint or the particular piece of metal. When they took it apart, where it actually broke they found on the base near the ball joint that connects it some erosion of that part. That is why they were concerned that it was a design fault rather than a simple fracture due to use.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, in regard to major event skills training and development of QAS paramedics in preparation for the Goodwill Games and CHOGM, what is the related cost of these events and where will the extra staff come from to cover these events? That is on page 2-5.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** One thing that I can assure you of today is that as a state, of course, we are delighted that we have been able to attract both CHOGM—the

Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting—and the Goodwill Games here to Brisbane. I am sure you would be only too aware what major economic benefits will accrue to the state in that regard. As minister, I have assured the parliament that we are doing all we can to make sure that we have a team of people available in regard to the CHOGM event and also the Goodwill Games.

I will start with CHOGM first of all. The QAS will be providing under contract to the CHOGM task force dedicated ambulance services at the following CHOGM functions. I will give you some idea of those: the CHOGM convention venue; the retreat venue; the royal motorcade; the CHOGM retreat and motorcades as required.

**Mr MALONE:** Is there a budget for covering that?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes, I will get to that. I know that question was asked. In addition, the QAS will meet its public safety and community obligations under the Ambulance Service Act to provide additional ambulance services to the associated CHOGM cultural and community activities. We have been actively involved in the whole-of-government strategic planning for CHOGM and will continue to be involved. The QAS has estimated that the cost of providing specific contract services to CHOGM will be \$65,000, and funding has been provided for that.

In terms of the Goodwill Games—we will be providing, under government Goodwill Games arrangements, dedicated ambulance services at the following Goodwill Games venues for various sporting events: areas such as South Bank Parklands, the ANZ Stadium, the Chandler Velodrome and Kurrawa Beach. In addition, the QAS will meet its public safety and community obligations under the Ambulance Service Act to provide additional ambulance services to the associated Goodwill Games and the Brisbane River Festival celebration and community events.

Again, we have been involved strategically in the planning for that. We have been actively involved in the preparation and delivery of the department's joint emergency services training program, which has as its objective the preparation of command response and communication centre personnel responding to various Goodwill Games related potential incidents. The QAS has estimated that the cost of providing specific contracted services to the Goodwill Games will be \$25,000 for first aid support and \$48,000 for ambulance service delivery.

**Mr MALONE:** In relation to rural fire brigades, how many vehicles are you aware of that do not conform to registration standards, or how many are under the concession?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I make some comments broadly on rural fire brigades? Queensland, as you know, has been well served by its system of volunteer-based community brigades for over five decades. The Queensland situation is unique, with the backbone of the state's fire front comprised of urban auxiliary and rural firefighters. The rural fire service is also unique in that it resonates from a partnership between the state's 44,000 volunteers, local governments and the state government in supporting auxiliary firefighters in rural, remote and provincial city areas.

**Mr MALONE:** Just the numbers of vehicles, Minister.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am getting to that, if you would be patient with me. Basically, in terms of our fleet itself, it is a partnership—that is what I want to say to you—between the Rural Fire Service, the local government and the community. These rural fire brigades, of course, do an absolutely tremendous job in

Queensland. I want to say to you—as you would probably be aware—that in the Sarina local news on 3 July I was very, very pleased to see in your electorate that the rural fire brigades are vital in helping to fight bushfires in the local area and maintain a healthy relationship with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. That is in the Sarina area of your community. I am sure that you would agree that the relationship between the rural fire brigades and the government and local government is very, very good. That detail of the answer I will pass over to the chief commissioner.

**Mr HARTLEY:** One of the unique things about the Rural Fire Service is that the vehicles for the individual community brigades—and they are community brigades—are either accessed or purchased in the beginning. The Rural Fire Service provided subsidised access to vehicles for a number of years and I understand that in about the last five years, 500 vehicles have been brought into the Rural Fire Service.

There is no statutory requirement for a rural fire vehicle to meet a machinery inspection or to be registered in any way. What the government has been undertaking to do is to work with the Department of Transport and, under the new federal regulatory changes, the Rural Fire Service will move with the Department of Transport and ultimately these vehicles will undertake safety inspections and machinery inspections.

The negotiations we have had with the Department of Transport and the Rural Fire Service will see a significant improvement in our vehicles. There is an understanding that there is an impact that would be experienced across those brigades and we have given departmental instructions to the staff that any vehicle that is considered by the district inspections not to be safe, then that vehicle should be taken off the road. We are working with the individual brigades to provide them with the subsidised funding to identify and prioritise the vehicles that are needed within the Rural Fire Service.

**Mr MALONE:** As a supplementary question to that, we have not actually had the answer as to how many vehicles out there are under the concession. The chief commissioner is saying that they do not have to conform to registered standards. Obviously, some of these vehicles have to go on the road and they are unregistered. We have a volunteer driving these vehicles. If there is an accident, are they covered by the Fire Service in terms of common law or any sort of law under which they could be sued? Could you just quickly cover that for me, please?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes. Can I thank you once again for the answer—for the question, I should say.

**Mr MALONE:** I will give you the answer to it, if you like. I would love to.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say that in this area of the Rural Fire Service, you would be well aware from your previous occupation that about 75 per cent of these are on-farm vehicles.

**Mr MALONE:** But they do travel on the road.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Under the act, there is a dispensation in regard to registration. The rural fire brigades themselves have an onus—indeed an obligation—to ensure that those vehicles are mechanically sound. As I have indicated, and as the Chief Fire Commissioner indicated as well, we have had a seven-year rural fire appliance replacement program. With that program, we have been able to have about 500 new fire appliances out there in the Rural Fire Service.

In terms of your question as to how many of those need to be replaced, the Chief Fire Commissioner has answered that, with due respect, by saying that it is a decision of the rural fire brigades to come to the government and to indicate to us when that replacement is required. In this particular year, we are replacing 58 of those. Indeed, with those 58 that are being replaced, that makes about 500 being replaced over about a five or six-year period.

**Mr MALONE:** There is about 600 to go?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** There are about 900 altogether. So as we look at our list of replacement vehicles, it is a matter of deciding. I know people would like the simplistic answer of, 'There are so many to go,' but can I say that we are looking at this with local government and the rural fire brigades. We are assessing over a seven-year replacement program. What we want out of this is that, by about the year 2005, no rural fire brigade vehicle will be over 20 years old. You would be aware that over the decades very old vehicles have been out there. That benchmark in 2005, I think, is an important one for us to work towards.

Rural fire brigade members are provided with workers compensation coverage subject to two things: the injury occurring whilst the member was engaged on a bona fide brigade activity; and, secondly, the member acting under the direction of and at the knowledge of the first officer at the time of the injury. That workers compensation that we have given as a government is very, very important for the rural fire volunteers. We want to make sure that we care for their needs. That is exactly what we are doing.

Can I say to you that some have tried to look at the comparison between the different states. In many ways, that is like looking at apples and oranges. We are committed to working with the Rural Fire Service and to reducing the age of our rural fire brigade appliance fleet, and we will do that.

**Mr MALONE:** With respect, the point that I was coming to is that things have changed quite dramatically in the past 10 or 15 years in terms of litigation. That is becoming very evident. My concern was for the volunteer who is out there on that vehicle and if he was subject to some sort of common law; not so much workers compensation, but common law. But I will keep moving from there.

I come back to the ambulances, if I might. Your commissioner indicated that you had an automotive engineer inspect these vehicles. Could the commissioner give us some indication of the identity of that person and his qualifications?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes, I will pass over to Dr FitzGerald.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** I understand that the individual's name is Mr Kit Bleakley. He is a certified practising automotive engineer. I am sorry, I do not have his specific qualifications, but perhaps we could get them to you. He is the engineer who works very closely with the Federal Office of Road Safety. He is Brisbane based and he is involved in developing a number of their standards. So they have quite a deal of respect for him and usually take his judgment.

**Mr MALONE:** Is he qualified in the area of conversions, because that is a very specific type of area? I am sure—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Would you like to take that on notice?

**Dr FITZGERALD:** We will have to take that on notice and get some information.

**Mr MALONE:** I might hand over to my colleague the member for Darling Downs for further questioning.

**Mr HOPPER:** I thank you for your rural vehicle program. I am the first officer of my fire brigade at home. Have you implemented finances for serious training programs on site for the Rural Fire Service? The reason I ask this question is that they have come to our area and they have had a training course in, say, Dalby and Maclagan. You cannot get the farmers to go to that. We have to get them on site.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Darling Downs for that important question. As I have indicated, the Rural Fire Service is a priority area under the umbrella of services that we are offered by the QFRA. In regard to the support that we have been giving to the Rural Fire Service, I would like to say that in this year's budget I announced a \$2.5 million allocation for training and support over a five-year period. The training that will be delivered through that program is diverse. As you know, we have a number of training officers across the Rural Fire Service in the state of Queensland and they do an excellent job on site in the work that they are doing.

It was only just a month or so ago that in Toowoomba I launched, with one of my ministerial colleagues, a rural fire CD, which acts to train people by distance learning. If we look at the fact that there are 44,000 volunteers involved in the Rural Fire Service across this state, we want to make absolutely sure that those 44,000 volunteers are given the very best possible training. If we tried to do that on site right the way across Queensland, I am sure that you would agree that that is an impossible task.

So what we have come up with is an online training option that has been developed through a joint initiative of both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. We have identified a number of volunteer training packages that require either development as new courses or a modification to reflect changed circumstances. Some of the ones that have been offered in past years have been from interstate. We have different climatic conditions and different vegetation, and also we have had international courses being offered as well. We believe that the courses that need to be offered to those rural firefighters who work so hard for us should be developed based on a Queensland model. Indeed, the modules that will be out there need to be developed in that way.

The funding has been provided in response to an audit of training needs completed at a district level. Based on this information, the Rural Fire Service training staff are in the process of finalising a detailed project plan to ensure that the material is developed and delivered to volunteers as soon as possible. Courses and packages that we are targeting this year include level 1 fire management, level 2 fire management, a fire warden program, a road accident awareness program, brigade trainer, brigade/secretary/treasurer/financial management, brigade officer, and development and communications. The funding will not only allow for the development of paper-based resource material, we also need to get into that multimedia format for delivery over the Internet as well. We need to have a mix of programs to ensure that we can get to as many rural volunteers as we can.

**Mr HOPPER:** Last night or the night before I saw on TV the burn-proof fire gear. Are you going to provide our Rural Fire Services with burn-proof overalls?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say that yesterday I launched for the QFRA and for the urban firefighters what can only be described as a revolution in terms of the type of firefighting equipment that we have. As one could see on the TV program last night, the technology and the progress that we have been able to make is quite outstanding. You can see that in the work that we did yesterday.

The Rural Fire Service currently provides a range of free personal protective equipment to volunteers, such as overalls—single and two-piece—helmets, gloves, goggles, smoke respirators, breathing apparatus and associated tunics and trousers as issued to urban firefighters. I may hand over to the Chief Fire Commissioner who can detail this progress that we have made with the urban firefighters and elaborate on the question that you have asked me.

**Mr HARTLEY:** As a first officer of the brigade, you would be appreciative of the overalls that are provided to rural firefighters and the initiative which the RFS has undertaken in the last couple of years to provide overalls with the new proban impregnated into the fabric, which provides them with a significant amount of fire protection for our rural firefighters and our volunteers.

The design of the overall, which is now provided to our volunteers, is significantly different from what you would normally get in the past. There has been an improvement in the boots and the protective clothing that is provided for volunteers. One of the things which, of course, you would also appreciate is the necessity to quickly don that protective clothing and, of course, the overall has proved to be the most successful type of protective clothing for our volunteers, although some of our volunteers have chosen to go for the two-piece outfit in their clothing. We will continue to monitor the success and the initiatives with finding protective clothing for our volunteers. As we progress with the new clothing for our urban officers, as the minister has already alluded to, we will continue to take that technology, both in the weave in the fabric, the thread that is used and the protection that is impregnated into that material, into the future for our volunteers. It is particularly important for us to provide that for them.

**Mr HOPPER:** For areas where rural fire brigades are a bit casual, would you consider implementing some sort of support to encourage them to establish an active fire service? We have a lot of areas out at home where there is a rural fire brigade but they are doing nothing.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank you for the question. I think that is a very good question that you have asked, because what I have seen particularly over the past few days is an enormous amount of support by the community for the rural fire brigades that are out there. Indeed, the newspaper cutting that I referred to before—in the member for Mirani's area—is about trying to reform the brigade in that Armstrong Beach area. I was delighted to see that that fire brigade indicated they had a very healthy relationship with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. It is very, very important to say that the Rural Fire Service is an umbrella organisation which supports the brigades, and so does local government. We give training, we give subsidised equipment, we give legal cover and WorkCover as well.

<sup>023</sup> I take this opportunity to pay tribute to those volunteers for the extraordinary service they provide to their communities. I note that our rural fire inspectors across the state work with groups attempting to form a brigade and with those that require more training or more equipment perhaps in their own area. I will ask the Chief Fire Commissioner to elaborate.

**Mr HARTLEY:** The individual brigades are made up by interested community-minded people, and this is unique to Queensland and Australia, who rally behind organisations as volunteers. It is true that a number of our brigades, of the 1,600 of them across the state, go through some teething pain. Some of them go through various stages of development. Some of that comes down to personalities.

The district inspector's role is to provide as much support as possible to the individual brigades to assist them in their development, to provide them with ideas particularly in fundraising and also to support them in their access to the subsidised equipment and their access to the gaming machine fund, for example.

Some of the brigades operate in a more social environment and that encourages local communities to become involved. Some of the brigades also are very, very active in their community, either in doing prescribed burns in pre-fire season, working in various activities in various fundraising roles and getting a higher profile. Once they have a higher profile, it is then also seen that that brigade seems to have a much higher level of morale and the participation levels are very high.

One of the things we have observed in the rural fire services is that once we provide them either with equipment, particularly more sophisticated equipment such as fire appliances, or where we have assisted in providing a brigade with a new fire station, there is certainly an enhanced involvement and recognition by the community that the rural brigade exists. Usually it is a building that provides that sort of medium, to provide that sort of support to brigades. We are conscious of it and are constantly working to support the brigades themselves.

**Mr HOPPER:** Would you consider providing awards for our active remote rural fire brigades that are showing and have shown that they have got their act together? I believe they need some recognition.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes. I agree that the 44,000 volunteers who work in our rural fire brigades deserve any commendation that we as a government and, indeed, as members of parliament can give them. They are on the front line in the rural fire services. Quite often they are out there doing the very best that they can for their communities and they need the support of government, not only from a financial perspective or a legal perspective, but certainly in terms of the awards that we can give them.

I am very pleased to say that I have given a number of rural fire service volunteers across rural and remote areas of Queensland awards since I have been the minister. In terms of fire, there is a structure of the award system itself that I will ask the Chief Commissioner to expand on in a moment.

This is the Year of the Volunteer. As minister, I have been delighted to be able to move through the different regions of Queensland and involve myself in handing out awards to some very worthy recipients of our appreciation as a community and as a government for the work that they have done. I will ask the Chief Commissioner to expand on that award structure.

**Mr HARTLEY:** Rewarding individuals for their contribution and what they provide for the brigades is always recognised. There are always areas where we can improve and do more of that. We are currently in the Year of the Volunteer. The Year of the Volunteer is a year, in a sense, of rewarding and recognising the work that volunteers contribute to the community. Right across the state through our programs as we go into September and October, there will be significant activity in relation to rural fire volunteers.

One of the other things that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority has initiated and worked with the volunteer part of our organisation on is recognition through national medals. As you can appreciate, many of those brigades have people who have been serving in these brigades for many, many years—20 to 30 years. Recognition through the national medal is a formal way of rewarding

contributions to the brigades and to the communities. Also, we have undertaken more recently to award various volunteers—and this is Australia's highest level of recognition—with the Australian Fire Service Medal. A number of volunteers have been receiving those medals.

As we develop further to reward our organisations, we can only do this better and we can only do this further. We want to continue to do that.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I would only be too happy, for the member's sake, to say that I would like to present some of those with you on some occasion. There are some great people in the rural fire service on the Darling Downs.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions by non-government members has expired. You are now in the home straight, minister. I call on the member for Noosa.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Understandably, the provision of services in the Cape York Peninsula has been a challenge to most governments. What is the QAS doing to improve service delivery in this area?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This area of the Cape York Peninsula is an important area under consideration by the department and, of course, by the government strategically through the Cape York partnership plan. Emergency services are provided to all indigenous Australian communities in a cost-effective manner. In remote and rural areas, most service delivery is undertaken by dedicated volunteers from within their local communities. My department is developing a five-year service delivery plan for the provision of emergency and disaster services to indigenous Australian communities in rural and remote areas at a cost of \$150,000 over the next 12 months. We need that strategic vision and direction to be able to work towards.

A new ambulance station was completed at Bamaga, which was allocated, with the Queensland Health new hospital facility, during the 1999-2000 year. QAS is working with the Cape York communities to establish services in the Cape York Peninsula, particularly the remote communities and out-stations. During the last financial year, the Aboriginal and Islander coordination unit has been actively involved in the Cape York development plan, which has seen the establishment of a field officer at Cohen. The position has recently been advertised and is expected to be completed this month.

QAS has in place partnership arrangements with the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business, the Napranum Aboriginal Council, the Yarrabah Aboriginal Council, and the Kuku Djungan and Living Waters Aboriginal Corporations for the employment of indigenous paramedics. The ATSI coordination unit was actively involved in the Department of Emergency Services' strategic plan for the employment of indigenous Australians, which was launched by the previous minister, Stephen Robertson, at Yarrabah on 6 December 2000. The QAS is actively recruiting indigenous Australians into its paramedic program.

The ATSI coordination unit was established in the 1998-99 financial year in Cairns. It should be located in Cairns, right near that gulf and peninsula area. It is there to develop and implement a comprehensive framework to provide better ambulance services to ATSI people. It continues to enhance services to those ATSI communities.

The ATSI coordination unit has also been actively involved in a project to enhance services in the Torres Strait. A grant of \$75,000 was provided by Queensland Health to the QAS and the Islander coordinating council to produce a report on enhancing the capacity of Islander communities to prevent and respond to

health care, emergencies and injuries. The draft report has been presented to Queensland Health and to the ICC. It is expected that the final report will go before the Torres Strait ICC meeting and then be released for publication. This is very important work that we are doing. We look forward to continuing that work this financial year.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Page 1-15, the fifth dot point, states that Volunteer Marine Rescue Association Queensland and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, of which Noosa, Bribie and Kawana are the best, both receive funding from your department. The volunteers and those they rescue rely heavily on the rescue vessel's worthiness. Will the minister inform the committee as to what measures have been taken to ensure vessel worthiness?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In no way could I argue with your judgment today. The introduction of the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994 and regulations 1995 impose a significant financial burden on the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland and Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association units. These regulations require that all volunteer marine rescue vessels be constructed and fitted out to meet marine survey standards and be registered as commercial vessels. All vessels had to meet those new requirements by 31 December last year.

The government recognised the urgency of the situation and provided funds commencing in the 1999-2000 financial year to assist the two associations to comply with those new regulations. The department provided \$1 million in 1999-2000 and a further \$1.5 million in 2000-01 to assist the two associations to bring their vessels into survey. An ongoing allocation of \$0.25 million will aid the associations in maintaining their vessels at the required standard, and that commences in this financial year.

The program has been completed, except for the delivery of two vessels. The Voluntary Marine Rescue Association has advised that a new replacement vessel for Burketown will not be delivered until August 2000. Burketown's present vessel cannot be brought into commercial survey economically and, therefore, must be replaced. The VMRAQ has made arrangements with Queensland Transport to extend the time frame to cover the current vessel until August 2001. There will be no reduction in the delivery of services to the community and no impact on the department.

Secondly, the new vessel for Keppel Sands was delivered in May. There was no reduction in the delivery of services to the community as a result of the time overrun. The final payment of the program was made to the two associations in September 2000.

I visited the Voluntary Marine Rescue Association in Mackay. We were able to see the vessel that provides a great service for the Mackay-Whitsunday area. I know that the member for Mackay is very proud of that service.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I am a bit parochial, like other members.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am a bit parochial as well, but why shouldn't you be parochial? Look at the services provided near the Mackay Port Authority. Any local member would be proud of it. The local member, Tim Mulherin, has worked extraordinarily hard to get the marina there and to get the new building for the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association and the surf club. I congratulate the chairman on work very well done.

**Mr MULHERIN:** Thank you, minister.

**Ms MOLLOY:** I turn to page 1-19 of the MPS, the fifth dot point. The Esso Longford gas explosion in Victoria was an unfortunate and costly reminder of the need for potentially dangerous facilities to operate safely. What recent steps have been taken in your portfolio to reduce the likelihood of such occurrences in Queensland?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is a very important question and, as members would be aware, the parliament recently passed the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act. I was very pleased to receive the support of the shadow minister and the opposition on that legislation. This is a significant community safety initiative designed to reduce the likelihood of incidents like the Esso Longford gas plant in Victoria, which killed two, injured eight and resulted in significant economic and social loss and, can I also say, inconvenience to the community of Victoria.

Its objective is to protect people, property and the environment from the harm that can be associated with chemical hazards, and preparations for its implementation are very well progressed. Once implemented, it will require the occupier of a major hazard facility such as an oil refinery to demonstrate that the facility is operating safely. In doing so, the occupier will be required to prepare a detailed safety report that, after approval, will provide the basis for regular safety audits. The occupier will also be required to communicate the hazards present to the neighbouring community, including an emergency plan to identify what to do in the event of a serious incident.

Based on national standards developed by the national Occupational Health and Safety Commission, this legislation will also streamline, simplify and replace existing legislation pertaining to the safe storage and handling of dangerous goods in a way that will contribute to national uniformity.

<sup>024</sup> The CHEM Unit in our Department of Emergency Services is absolutely unique. I would like again to take the opportunity to congratulate the members of the CHEM Unit, especially their director Alan Brunner, for the excellent work that they have done to bring this into reality. We have additional resourcing with the recruitment of five additional scientific professionals. The CHEM Unit of my department has the resources needed to implement this important piece of community safety legislation. As the shadow minister asked about this in the parliament, I would like to talk about the impact on the farming sector as well. As for the rural sector, I am pleased to note that discussions between the CHEM Unit and the Queensland Farmers Federation have already commenced to ensure that the impacts of the legislation will be commensurate with a sensible management of the risks involved. I gave that assurance in the parliament in May when this bill was going through. I would like to say to the estimates committee again today that those discussions have been held. This is a sensible way of working with the farming sector. Those discussions we have had with the Queensland Farmers Federation have been productive and fruitful and will continue.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I refer to page 3-14 and the heading 'Timeliness'. Response time to a reported fire is a key performance indicator. Strategic location of fire stations would be a major consideration in achieving high levels of performance. How does the QFRA determine these locations?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In response to increasing service demands and the need to provide an equitable service delivery model to the people of Queensland, the QFRA initiated the development of a service delivery model called the Fire and Rescue Resource Allocation Model, or FARRAM as it is known around the QFRA, to provide an objective means for a comparative analysis of community risks as they

apply to service delivery. The data currently input into the model relates to specific socioeconomic land and property groups, mobile property and response data relevant to those areas. As a model, FARRAM has essentially been completed. The integrity of FARRAM is, however, heavily reliant on the continuous input of quality data to ensure that the modelling reflects the changing profiles of the communities around Queensland.

FARRAM applies a risk assessment methodology to communities throughout Queensland to assist in the assessment and comparison of both current and, also importantly, emerging needs of those communities. FARRAM results are based on an analysis of data sets that have been captured from a number of sources. The analysis of this data includes regression and correlation analysis to establish validity and to remove instances of information overlap. Valid correlation between fire incidence and community groups has been established in relation to levels of home ownership/rental, levels of unemployment, proportion of population aged less than 39 years of age and education skill levels of the population.

The model provides analysis of the selected data to generate a numerical value for each location that represents the total risk profile of that location. Numerical values generated for each location enable a comparison of the relative risk profile against other communities. The most appropriate service delivery model for a particular location will ultimately be a unique mixture of community safety and operational response capability. Any variations in operational response capability between locations of a similar risk profile may logically be offset by increased attention to community safety strategies and activities within those communities.

FARRAM is very much a management tool that will assist in the determination of service delivery right across Queensland. Data availability and updates will result in constant changes, albeit relatively minor changes. Future improvements to the model and the range of data available for input may also generate changes to the results that have been delivered by the model.

In terms of service delivery, as we increase the number of fire stations around Queensland and as we look at the demographic changes in the profiles of communities, especially in expanding areas of population and, for example, the changes we see in inner cities, we quite often need to change the service delivery model.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** As a former teacher in an isolated indigenous community, I understand that lack of services in these areas is an ongoing concern. What is the QAS doing to address the concerns of these communities?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** As a former teacher in an indigenous community, you would be very much aware of the need to increase the capacity for members of those communities to tackle many of these concerns themselves by way of self-management. I think the strategy I outlined before is very important in ensuring that we have a dual approach in regard to service delivery and also in terms of employment and the involvement of volunteers.

The Queensland Ambulance Service currently provides a dedicated service to a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities—Thursday Island, Bamaga, Weipa, Cooktown, Yarrabah, Doomadgee, Mornington Island, Palm Island, Woorabinda and Cherbourg. During 1999-2000, funding was provided to establish new services at Doomadgee and Palm Island. The station that I know a lot about on Palm Island is a very successful station working with the new Joyce Palmer medical facility on Palm. We have seen a great involvement in, including at

an honorary level, and support by the Palm Island community for that new ambulance station.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coordination Unit has been actively involved in the Department of Emergency Services strategic plan for employment of indigenous Australians. As I indicated earlier, that was launched by my predecessor with the member for Mulgrave, Warren Pitt, in Yarrabah on 6 December 2000. The QAS is actively recruiting indigenous Australians into its paramedic program.

The QAS ATSI Coordination Unit established in Cairns just three years ago is there to develop and implement a comprehensive policy framework to provide better ambulance services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It continues to enhance services to those communities across the state. The framework that they have put in place to ensure that dual strategy is worked on includes guidelines within which we can work in a very culturally appropriate way with indigenous communities. We can also work with clinically appropriate service delivery to urban, rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The unit works to identify opportunities to share resources and to coordinate projects with other health service care providers. We have also brought into play educational support packages to our Queensland Ambulance Service officers who deliver services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Those programs include the delivery of cross-cultural awareness training. We can be very proud of what the department has done. As I indicated before, we are one of the leaders in government and I am very proud of that fact.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Queensland is well served by a network of local ambulance committees across the state. Can you outline the benefits that, in your opinion, these bodies bring to the Queensland Ambulance Service and explain how the QAS utilises the services of LAC members?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The local ambulance committees in Queensland do an excellent job in partnership with the QAS stations. We cannot underestimate the importance of the work of the LAC committees. If we look back at the 10 years of the implementation of the QAS, when that was formed in 1991 we had 96 QATBs across the state of Queensland. Today we have 176 local ambulance committees that operate in Queensland. In fact, it was not so long ago that I was at the Sarina Ambulance Station and I met with the very vigorous members of the LAC in the shadow minister's electorate.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Bruce Gibson in Mackay.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Bruce has been an institution with the LACs in Mackay. They have done an absolutely tremendous job. When I was in Sarina, I noted that the president and the local ambulance committee members are dedicated, committed and keen in regard to the work that they do on the LAC committee. Those 176 LACs do a tremendous job. I went to the state conference of LACs along with the commissioner of the QAS and the director-general of the department. We could see from a statewide level the work that they are doing.

I am proud to say that in 2000-01 nearly \$1 million—\$0.878 million—was provided by LACs. We are expecting something like \$0.72 million this financial year as well. The LACs also work with the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund. They are often able to access the funds from the benefit fund to aid the work that the ambulance is doing in those areas.

One thing that I would like to say today is that whether we are looking at rural fire services, ambulance services, fire services in general or the SES, Queensland has a unique model for emergency service delivery. This is the same in ambulances and the same in rural fire. It is a partnership between the government, quite often local government and volunteer organisations.

Volunteers, whether they are out on the Darling Downs, in the area of the member for Mirani or in the Kawana, Noosa or Pumicestone areas, want to have an involvement in those services. It is exactly the same with the rural fire brigades. Our volunteers have the commitment, dedication, foresight and vision to be involved. They do a great job. Today I pay tribute to the members of our 176 LACs in Queensland for the great work that they are doing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Emergency Services has expired. I thank you, Minister, and your departmental officers for your attendance here today.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank you, Mr Chairman, for your diligence as chairman of this estimates committee, and the six members of the estimates committee. As you know, this is my first estimates committee. I would like to particularly thank the shadow minister for emergency services. We may disagree from time to time on the priorities or issues, but we do try to work together for the ultimate benefit of the people of Queensland. I thank the Independent member for Darling Downs and the member for Warrego, who is not here at the moment, the deputy chair. I thank the three government members I work with on an ongoing basis to make sure that emergency services are delivered in the way we want them to be delivered. The members for Kawana, Noosa and Pumicestone have a particular interest in these areas. I look forward to working with you all over this financial year in this very important area of Emergency Services.

Sitting suspended from 3.56 p.m. to 4.32 p.m.

**ENVIRONMENT****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. D. M. Wells, Minister for Environment  
Mr J. Purtill, Acting Director-General, Environmental Protection Agency  
Mr B. Carroll, Director, Corporate Development  
Dr J. Cole, Director, Sustainable Industries  
Ms O. Crimp, Director, Environmental Planning  
Ms K. Davis, Assistant Manager, Resource Management, Corporate Development, Financial Services  
Mr A. Feely, Regional Service Director, Southern Region (EPA)  
Dr B. Head, Executive Director, Environmental Policy and Economics  
Dr I. McPhail, Executive Director, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service  
Ms C. Skippington, Regional Service Director, Southern Region (QPWS)  
Mr R. Speirs, Director, Parks and Wildlife Management (QPWS)  
Mr M. Williamson, Acting Director, Environmental Operations  
Dr M. Gellender, Principal Program Officer—Energy Innovation, Sustainable Industries Division (EPA)  
Mr G. Clare, Director, Forest Management

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<sup>025</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** Good afternoon. Before we begin, please make sure that all mobile phones are turned off to prevent disruption to committee proceedings. I now declare the committee's hearing open. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Environment. I would like to welcome you here today, Minister, and your departmental staff.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A warning bell will be given 15 seconds prior to the expiration of these time limits. An extension may be given with the consent of the questioner. The estimates committee process rules require that at least half the time has to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record the information in their transcript. I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment to be open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make an opening statement?

**Mr WELLS:** The protection of our unique environment is one of the most pressing challenges facing government at all levels in Australia. I am pleased to say that the Beattie government has responded accordingly. An indication of the importance that this government places on the environment is the level of spending across every agency on environmental issues. One again, we have allocated record funding to the Environmental Protection Agency, which incorporates the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service. With this money, we build on the gains made in our first term of government.

In mentioning the gains made during our first term, it is appropriate to reflect on the current state of Queensland's environment. Some significant improvements have been made to our air quality in recent years. The abolition of the leaded fuels in March this year has contributed to a dramatic decrease in lead levels in south-east Queensland to the point where lead is virtually no longer an environmental hazard. Carbon monoxide emissions are declining due to improved emission controls despite the overall increase in vehicle numbers. Sulfur dioxide levels in south-east Queensland have not exceeded the accepted standards for three years. In fact, the levels rarely reach one-quarter of the recommended standard.

There is some similar good news with regard to water quality. Forty-four out of 46 beach sites monitored in south-east Queensland meet water quality standards when tested annually by the EPA. Upgrades to sewage treatment plants in south-east Queensland have resulted in improvements to water quality in Moreton Bay. In the Brisbane River catchment, improving trends have been recorded in tributaries such as Tingalpa and Oxley Creeks. This government can now build on some of these achievements with this year's record funding for the environment.

We have also transferred a number of important functions to the EPA and Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service from other government departments to further strengthen the EPA's role and decisive environmental stewardship. Funding for the EPA this year has been boosted to \$341 million. This total comprises an operating budget of \$317 million and a capital budget of almost \$24 million. Of this total, \$215 million has been allocated for parks, wildlife and forest operations.

The environment is this state's most strategic asset and is critical to our economic and social wellbeing as well as our quality of life. Our natural environment not only provides the life support system on which we all depend; it is our natural capital and underpins Queensland's economic prosperity. Jobs are once again a key element of the EPA's budget. An extra \$10 million has been provided to the Queensland Parks and Wildlife service in 2001-02 to employ 80 extra rangers and improve maintenance within our protected area estate.

We will continue with the second year of the successful four-year Better Parks Program, which will result in improved visitor facilities within popular national parks throughout the state. Within the Better Parks Program another 100 trainee positions will be allocated. Our extensive program of capital works is worth more than \$12 million this year. These projects will boost employment in regional communities by providing direct jobs during construction as well as indirectly stimulating tourism. The Beattie government has further recognised the enormous tourism appeal of our protected areas by allocating \$2 million this year for the Great Walks of Queensland Program. This initiative will put Queensland on the international map as a nature-based tourism destination and provide real benefits to regional communities.

All these commitments provide compelling evidence of the government's continuing investment in ensuring a better quality of life for Queenslanders. Our investment will allow us to continue our work to better protect our natural heritage, plan for coastal management, protect the Great Barrier Reef, provide for young people, promote sustainable development and renewable energy, curb salinity and build on the environmental reforms of the past three years.

I would like to make special mention of the government's commitment to green power and reduced greenhouse gas emissions in this year's budget. The 2001-02 EPA budget funds a broad range of cleaner energy initiatives. These range from rebates for home owners who install solar hot water systems to major incentives for energy efficient industries. The introduction of competitive, renewable and

alternative energy sources will help create more jobs for Queenslanders and build regional areas. This is the Smart State in practice.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before we commence, the committee has resolved that non-committee members may ask questions of the minister. On that basis, I now call the member for Keppel, the Honourable Vince Lester, the shadow spokesperson for the environment.

**Mr LESTER:** I note on page 16 of the MPS the estimated actual average investment per hectare is \$1 less per hectare than the anticipated amount of \$5.50, which was approximately the average spent in the previous year. When the calculations are done, this equates approximately to a \$7 million underspend in the QPWS operational budget. I note in an answer to a question on notice you justify this underspend by the exclusion of a consideration for depreciation on equity return. I do not accept this excuse as I assume that these figures were factored in originally. The estimated figure last year would have been \$1 more. Can you give me the real reason for this massive underspend considering the impoverished state of our national parks in Queensland?

**Mr WELLS:** The real reason is the reason that I gave you in the answer to the question on notice. That is the reason. You have to consider that in Queensland we have a massive representation in comparison with some other states as far as our environment is concerned. The area of protected estate compared with some others is enormous. Consequently, the investment that we have made here is considerable. The underspend, as you describe it, is in fact not an underspend; it is actually greater than what was estimated if you take into account those two factors of depreciation and the equity return.

**Mr LESTER:** Last year the previous minister heralded the budget as a win for national parks as your government was injecting an extra \$11.1 million through the Better Parks Program. As noted in my previous question, in actual fact the real expenditure per hectare was considerably less than projected. I note an almost identical claim this year. Why should the people of Queensland, the ultimate owners of the natural heritage in these parks, have any faith at all that you will actually pass on this desperately needed funding?

**Mr WELLS:** I cannot see any reason whatsoever for your scepticism on the point. I thought that the answer to the last question was reasonably clear. The answer is exactly as I gave it to you in the answer to the question on notice. I have the executive director of Parks and Wildlife here. I will invite him to give additional information.

**Dr McPHAIL:** The amount allocated under the Better Parks Program last year was \$11.1 million for capital works on parks. That is the same amount that is allocated this year. That full amount of money was made available for distribution to the regions for capital expenditure. The \$11.1 million in this year's budget consists of \$5 million for a construction program of visitor facilities and park management infrastructure. We get for the first time a \$1 million maintenance amount for upgrading existing park infrastructure. We have \$4.1 million to create up to 100 new trainee positions in park management for young Queenslanders and we have \$1 million for improving systems for managing parks so that in the future we can make better investment decisions and more timely maintenance decisions in relation to infrastructure.

**Mr LESTER:** You really have not answered the question in line with the fact that you have not factored in depreciation and equity to last year's budget. I just simply ask why.

**Mr WELLS:** Can you refer to the line of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements that you are referring to and perhaps we can address the matter specifically?

**The CHAIRMAN:** The minister has requested that you refer to the actual line in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and he may be able to answer your question.

**Mr LESTER:** I note your answer to question No. 4 of the non-government questions on notice in which you state that no figures are available to ascertain either recurrent or capital funding allocation to each national park and, instead, can only provide indicative funding by region. I ask, firstly: is this so; and, secondly, do you actually know how much each national park is costing you? If the answer is 'yes', please provide this to the committee. If the answer is 'no', then how can you effectively manage national parks while you are not certain of the actual costs?

**Mr WELLS:** We have given you an overall budget for the regions. Your demand that we should tell you exactly how much is being spent on recurrent, for example, in each particular national park is an unrealistic one. One of the reasons for that is that rangers do not work in just one national park. They tend to work in the same region, but that is not always the case either. We have some rangers who have moved right around the state. To ask, 'How many rangers have you got working in a particular national park and, therefore, what is the budget for that particular national park?' is totally and completely unrealistic and rests on a failure to accept the essential nature of work in the Parks and Wildlife Service. That is the reason why you get the funds by way of region.

If you want to know how much is spent on each national park, the only way we can tell you is to give you the indicative amount by region. We can tell you how many rangers are generally in a national park, but we cannot say to you that the rangers are going to be there all the time. For example, if there is a serious pest problem in a particular national park, then rangers are brought from other areas in order to address that pest problem in that national park for as long as it takes.

We are dealing with a system which is essentially fluid. It is just unrealistic to ask for that kind of precision. It is not like running a factory where there are so many units of production to be done and so many people to perform each unit of production. It is not like that. We are dealing here with nature and consequently you have to consider the fluidity of mother nature in order to deal with it.

<sup>026</sup> **Mr LESTER:** I note your answer to question 4 of the non-government questions on notice. You comment that the capital works budget is an interim budget at this stage and that the capital works budget will be conveyed to regions following ministerial consideration. Why have you not as yet given ministerial consideration to conveying the capital works to individual national parks when the funds are so needed?

**Mr WELLS:** The amount is fixed, but the capital works program for any department takes time to formulate and requires a series of decisions. Since you twist my arm and since you ask, I am very pleased to announce that among the key initiatives of the capital works program will be a sum of \$360,000 to rebuild and reopen the Tallebudgera green space boardwalk, almost \$165,000 for improvements to the Great Sandy National Park, including \$107,000 to build toilets at Freshwater camp ground in the Cooloola section, and \$50,000 to design a new boardwalk at the internationally significant Central Station on Fraser Island. There is

also \$177,000 to upgrade the Coomera Lookout and initial works towards reopening the Coomera track at Lamington National Park and about \$225,000 for works at Eungella National Park, including \$200,000 for better toilets, car parking and landscaping at Broken River, as well as \$25,500 to redevelop sky window and Peases Lookout.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Mirani will be pleased about that, Minister. I am.

**Mr LESTER:** With reference to the output performance listed on page 13 of the MPS relating to parks and wildlife management, can you give a guarantee that camping and visitor access to facilities on all national parks will not be reduced and instead be upgraded? Further, will you comment on the establishment of the ecological integrity statements as a comprehensive monitoring program of the condition of our national parks and any threat to ecological integrity, taking into consideration community concerns with issues such as weeds and feral animals? Will that be fully assessed and appropriate management action taken? I have recently been to a national park where the pigs have caused quite a bit of havoc, and I know that that is not simple to fix but it is something we have to assess.

**Mr WELLS:** You are quite right. It is not simply fixed. If I could refer first to the second and general part of your question. The issue of ferals and the condition of the national parks generally is one we seriously have to address. That is why the \$10 million program has been put in place. The 80 additional rangers which will be put on this year will have three jobs in particular. One will be the control of ferals, weeds and fire. Another will be the management of visitor infrastructure and the other will be wildlife management. Those will be the three functions of the 80 additional rangers that are going to be put on. The addition of those 80 people is going to have a significant impact.

If you consider the size of the national estate in Queensland, it is very extensive indeed. I think that you are perfectly correct, if I may so say with respect, to point out that things can be improved. But this is a significant and a dynamic step in the direction of improving them. As you know, this was an election undertaking and it has been fulfilled in our first budget. We will have those people in very significant numbers on line in September. After September I would be very pleased to hear from you personally if you would like to indicate to me areas where you think particular attention needs to be paid, because we will have those additional resources. This is a department which is very sensitive to representations from members of parliament as to where the resources need to be applied.

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you, Minister. It is an enormous problem and, as I said before, one that is not easy to fix. Should foot-and-mouth disease ever come to this country—and I hope it never does—feral pigs would be an enormous problem. We have to spend as much as we can on that. I am pleased to see that efforts are being made to try to do something. I turn to page 28 of the Capital Statement which refers to the Environmental Protection Agency. It states that \$3.7 million has been expended on additional works on parks out of a total project expenditure of \$9.3 million, with \$2.8 million to be expended this coming year. I further refer to page 81 of last year's Capital Statement where this item was listed as a new project with a total estimated cost of \$11.2 million, with \$5.1 million to be expended in 2000-01. Why has this project lost \$2 million of the total estimated funding? Why was almost \$1.5 million underspent last year?

**Mr WELLS:** It has not been lost. It has been carried over.

**Mr LESTER:** Are you sure?

**Mr WELLS:** Sure. Promise.

**Mr LESTER:** We will see. I note that the last bullet point of 'Recent Achievements' on page 14 of the MPS refers to the completed dingo risk assessment study for Fraser Island. I ask the minister to detail exactly why the assessment was delayed until a tragedy occurred on this island, despite the many warning signs in a two year old draft report which was not acted upon. In other words, we had been told about this impending problem and we really did not do a lot about it.

**Mr WELLS:** There was not a previous risk assessment. There was a management plan. That was done in 1999. It was being implemented progressively. Some 30 of the 54 recommendations—do not hold me to this, but I think there were 54 recommendations—were implemented under my predecessor. That included all of the significant and important ones. Many of those that were remaining were proposals for study or further research, and that was under way. So the vast amount of it was already implemented or in the process of being implemented at the time. The tragedy which occurred did not have anything to do with the implementation of any such management plan. The risk assessment which we did when the tragedy occurred was a different kind of process. You can see the result that it has had.

We had to remove those dingoes which had become habituated to human contact. The dingoes which were habituated to human contact had always been habituated by means of the intermediary process of food. In other words, the numbers of dingoes that were in excess of what the island could support living in the wild was precisely the number of habituated dingoes. We culled those habituated dingoes and we have now reverted to a situation where dingoes are living in the wild. There will still be plenty of dingoes on Fraser Island. The population is viable, but they will be dingoes that will not come up and approach human beings. Those generations of tourists, both international and local, who have encouraged dingoes to come up close to them and habituated them to human contact created a population of dingoes that constituted a danger on Fraser Island. The cull which has been done has now removed that danger.

There are, however, a series of other actions that have been put in place as a result of the risk assessment. I have reported to the parliament extensively on what those actions are. I think that the situation has now improved considerably, even since the time that the risk assessment was undertaken. Of course, it is important for everybody to remember that dingoes are wild animals. They are not dogs. They are in fact wolves of the species *lupus canis dingo*. They are wild animals, just the same as a lion or tiger in an African wildlife park is a wild animal. So they must be treated with extreme caution at all times. We are putting up signs. We are putting out pamphlets. We have rangers going around telling people that this is being done in order to preserve human life.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The time for questions from non-government members has expired.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, on page 1 of the MPS you mention the establishment of renewable energy systems. Can the minister advise the committee what the EPA is doing to support renewable energy generation in Queensland, particularly solar energy? What are the benefits?

**Mr WELLS:** The other day I went to Tully to launch Queensland's first solar school. The Tully State High School has solar panels which collect electricity from

the sun. Tully State High School is no longer totally dependent on energy produced by fossil fuels. The benefit of this is enormous. The greenhouse gases that are produced in the production of electricity are very considerable. The mitigation of the greenhouse effect that we achieve just by doing this just at Tully State High School is quite considerable. It saves Tully State High School approximately \$500 a year from memory. This is the first of 17 in a series of pilots that are being done at schools. There is much more to this, however. I would ask Dr John Cole, the director of Sustainable Industries, if he would speak further to this issue.

**Dr COLE:** The EPA, as the minister has alluded to, administers a number of rebate schemes to encourage renewable energy being generated across Queensland. These schemes provide support to a number of targeted groups in achieving reliable energy supply and are a significant boost to the local renewable energy industry. The Remote Area Power Supply Rebate Program, called RAPS, assists households that are not connected to the grid to install renewable energy equipment, and that can be solar, wind or hydro. It also provides assistance for the associated supporting equipment to meet the electricity needs of remotely located Queenslanders. Rebates of up to \$7,500 per household apply. In the year 2001-02, \$2.02 million has been allocated for the RAPS rebate scheme. This has been successfully combined with the Commonwealth's Photovoltaic Rebate Program in 2000. Overall, 1,020 households across Queensland have applied for and are all receiving funding under these schemes.

<sup>027</sup> Another scheme is the Working Property Rebate Scheme. It applies to families who own working properties in western and northern Queensland. This scheme, which sources some funding from the Commonwealth's Renewable Remote Power Generation Program, provides rebates of up to \$175,000 per property for the installation of large renewable schemes. The other major program we have, of course, is the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme. It is an initiative aimed at ordinary Queensland households and provides up to \$750 for the installation of a solar hot water system.

**Ms MOLLOY:** I refer to page 1 of the MPS. What is the Queensland government doing to support the use of alternative fuels? What benefits are there in using such fuels as ethanol?

**Mr WELLS:** The amount of greenhouse gases that could be prevented from entering the atmosphere by the universal use in Queensland of ethanol would be something like one million tonnes in a single year. That is from Queensland alone. It would be a dramatic reduction in the amount of greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere. As I told the parliament the other day, I am driving my car on ethanol at the moment—on E10, a mixture of ethanol and petrol. This does not just increase by 10 per cent the amount of Queensland content; it runs the car just as well as it did before I put the ethanol in. It handles as well, it accelerates as well and the fuel economy is at least as good. Do not take it from me. I would like to get on record the endorsement of one of my departmental scientists, Dr Martin Gellender.

**Dr GELLENDER:** Some of the benefits of fuel ethanol, supported by scientific analysis, include the findings that there are significant greenhouse abatement dividends to be achieved. Life cycle analysis undertaken by CSIRO and the Sugar Research Institute shows that the net greenhouse gases in motor vehicle emissions could be reduced by from six to eight per cent by blending ethanol with petrol at a ratio of one to 10.

Using E10 instead of petrol would reduce the emissions of carbon monoxide, benzene and 1,3-Butadiene. For the carbon monoxide there is up to 32 per cent

reduction, for benzene the reduction is up to 27 per cent and for butadiene the figure is up to 19 per cent. This work was done for the Energy Research and Development Corporation in 1998. Because ethanol contains no sulfur, vehicle emissions of sulfur dioxide would reduce proportionately.

MTBE has been promoted as an additive to petrol that provides additional octane at low cost. Queensland has effectively banned the use of MTBE because it has been shown in use overseas to be a major risk to ground and surface waters. Ethanol has the potential to deliver similar benefits with much lower environmental risk.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 19 of the MPS reference is made to capital works on national parks. Can you provide more detail about the capital works program, with particular emphasis on enhanced maintenance on national parks?

**Mr WELLS:** The 2001-02 capital works program includes \$7.4 million to fund works on parks and forests, including the second year of the successful four-year \$37.7 million Better Parks Program; \$2.8 million for works associated with the 100 Better Parks trainee positions funded by the state government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative; and \$2 million for the first instalment of the five-year \$10 million Great Walks of Queensland program. Other details I gave when the honourable member for Keppel asked me a question earlier.

I pay tribute to the honourable member for Keppel. A little while ago I visited his electorate, at his invitation, to look at the bat caves in Mount Etna. There we had a program where a number of youth trainees were busy building stairs up the side of the mountain. It is not an inconsiderable mountain and, of course, as a result of this the young people were not inconsiderably fit. We decided we would go up the mountain, and when we had finished climbing the steps we did the rest of the walk as well. I looked behind me and saw people trailing behind me for miles and miles—large numbers of people travelling behind me. Do you know who was right behind me? It was the supremely fit member for Keppel. And I would like to put on the record that he was walking forward at the time.

**Mr LESTER:** I will also let you know that I am a hobby horse champion of the Keppel electorate, too—beating Kirsten Livermore and other people much, much younger than me!

**Ms MOLLOY:** Pages 2 and 19 of the MPS mention establishing the Great Walks of Queensland program. Minister, can you explain what benefits the Great Walks of Queensland initiative will deliver to regional communities in Queensland?

**Mr WELLS:** That is a \$10 million program over five years. These are going to be icon walks. The pilots are going to be in the Blackall Range, in the Gold Coast hinterland, on Fraser Island, in the Mackay-Whitsunday area and in the Wet Tropics area. We will have a network of walking paths that will be the rival of those in the most dramatic areas of New Zealand. To tell you a little more about that I will ask Bob Speirs, who is the head of that particular division, to come forward.

**Mr SPEIRS:** The great walks program is \$2 million this year but \$10 million over five years. It is to create a world-class network of walking tracks and other low-impact facilities to visitors to parks and forests across Queensland. The Great Walks of Queensland will become a system of icon walking tracks providing opportunities to promote Queensland's protected areas and state forests, both nationally and internationally. The walks will provide an opportunity for Queensland families as well as tourists to see some of the most special and spectacular parts of the state on long distance walks. It is hoped to emulate the success of similar famous walks,

such as the Milford Track in New Zealand, and to make them a special experience that can be undertaken by people of all ages and at all levels of fitness.

There are five pilot areas: the Blackall Range, the Gold Coast hinterland, Fraser Island, the Mackay-Whitsunday region and the Wet Tropics. The five areas will require close consultation with the local authorities and local communities on the development and operation of the walking track network. Links with regional development programs will be established to involve local communities in the development of the program. A marketing plan and an interpretive plan will be developed, and investigations into the commercial opportunities, delivery mechanisms and maintenance operations will take place.

Specifically, the benefits of the great walks program will be increased tourism and visitation to regional communities, which will provide economic benefits to local businesses. Commercial operators will benefit from the increased tourism opportunities and from use of those walks. Employment will be created during the construction of the great walks, increasing local job opportunities. Also, regional communities will be promoted and show-cased as a result of the marketing plan that will be implemented.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer you to page 1 of the MPS and the reference to renewable energy in Queensland. You are no doubt aware of the Solar Challenge. How are you supporting it?

**Mr WELLS:** I am \$40,000 aware of the Solar Challenge because we had an approach from the Burdekin Catholic high school to enable 14 students to enter the 2001 World Solar Challenge. This seemed like a really good idea and we gave them \$10,000. Subsequently we had requests from a number of schools, some of whom had enterprising state members, such as a school in Mackay, Toowong College and the Southern Cross Catholic college, so we have given them \$10,000 each as well. We will not necessarily get caught out like that again this coming year. It might not be that we will be in a position to fund every school that comes up with the idea of having a solar car. We are not promising it for next year, but this year we did that and we gave a boost to the solar car challenge, particularly in respect of those schools that were going to participate.

**The CHAIRMAN:** It is an international event.

**Mr WELLS:** It is an international event. I think we can be very proud that so many of our schools are involved and that so many of them are being supported so richly by the Environmental Protection Agency.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The car from Mackay is shaped like a platypus.

**Mr WELLS:** Shaped like a platypus? I hope that it will have on it appropriate livery, acknowledging the support of the EPA, because we like to support platypi. In fact, if it is shaped like a platypus we can give them livery that will reflect the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service as well. It is being suggested to me by the executive director of Parks and Wildlife that, if it is shaped like a platypus, as well as livery it should also have a poisoned talon to see off its enemies.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Page 7 of the MPS mentions environmental planning strategies and practices to protect the environment. Minister, can you advise on the government's response to the recent lymbya outbreak, which you have seen first hand on your recent visit to Godwin Beach in my electorate of Pumicestone?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. I went to Godwin Beach, as you mentioned, and I saw the lymbya first hand. It is located in Deception Bay, so the lymbya is just across the

water from my electorate. It is a high priority of the government to deal with the lyngbya. When I was there I ordered that particular attacks should be made not merely in research but also in actually clearing this up. I am very glad to say that the lyngbya in Deception Bay has abated very considerably. I am not sure how much we did. I think it went away just because I went there, because when we sent people out to clean it up it was much reduced already. I will ask Olwyn Crimp, who is the director of the relevant division, to come and speak further to the committee about the lyngbya.

**Ms CRIMP:** From late January to early July 2000 there was a significant outbreak of lyngbya within Moreton Bay, particularly in the Deception Bay area and also over on the Amity Banks of North Stradbroke Island. These outbreaks occurred again in December 2000 and in January of this year and were again on the Amity Banks in April this year. As a result of the first outbreak, the government responded rapidly and a lyngbya steering committee was set up. It comprised representatives of all of the relevant local government agencies, all of the relevant state government agencies, and all of the industry partners and community partners that may be involved or have an issue with lyngbya in the area.

Lyngbya does have the potential to cause serious health and environmental problems. Health problems can include dermatitis and skin blistering, and it can exacerbate asthma in people who are prone to that. It can also have significant environmental impacts. It can lead to the destruction of seagrass beds, impacting on turtle and dugong habitat, as well as cause declines in the fisheries, both commercial and recreational.

<sup>028</sup> The government has responded with significant funding to the lyngbya research and mitigation program. In addition, the local government has also responded in kind to the extent that there was \$595,000 committed in the year 2000-01 for lyngbya. This has also been committed again for the following year, and there will be a workshop on North Stradbroke Island to look at the draft strategy in about two weeks time with international experts.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for questions from government members has expired.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, I refer you to page 14 and future developments. Part of my vision for rebuilding our country towns is to provide tourist attractions which will bring in outside money. One of my visions is to provide a dingo zoo in the town of Jandowae. This will no doubt need government funding. It will create jobs in the bush. Would you please keep this in mind for the not-too-distant future? It may also turn around the negativity involved with the culling of the dingoes on Fraser Island and it will no doubt bring thousands of people to our town.

**Mr WELLS:** Okay.

**Mr HOPPER:** Is that the answer?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes.

**Mr HOPPER:** Thank you. I will ask you another question now. Have you considered promoting wind-generated power plants to generate electricity instead of coal fired? Wind power is extremely environmentally friendly. The Crows Nest shire has a vision, and I think it will take off. Stanwell are behind this. It will also make a fine tourist attraction. Will you be promoting these in the future?

**Mr WELLS:** I take the opportunity to announce that we have a wind generator on Fraser Island. It is at Sandy Cape. The wind farm that we have is on the Atherton Tableland, I am sorry. We have other forms of alternative energy on Fraser Island

that I will refer to later on in the estimates hearing, if I have the opportunity. But the use of wind as an alternative technology is favoured by my department. We would like to do as much of it as we possibly can. However, the Queensland conditions are not as benign for wind generation as they are in some parts of Western Australia, for example. That does not mean that we cannot use it at all, as the Atherton example gives, and there are specific areas of the state where it is particularly windy and, therefore, particularly benign for the purposes of wind-generated electricity.

In other circumstances, solar electricity will be preferable. We will use the mix of alternative energy that is going to be most benign in the circumstances. We have an aspiration that all of our remote national parks that have facilities that require electricity should be run on the basis of alternative energy. We have at the moment seven that are. And from memory, we have to get another 30 going along that basis. I will invite Dr John Cole of the Sustainable Industries Division to come up.

I have just been given a note here that I was correct when I said that there was a wind generator system at Fraser Island. As well as that we have the Atherton Tableland unit. So your ideas are good, and we are happy to work with them wherever the situation is benign enough to do it. John, could you say a few more words in the time remaining?

**Dr COLE:** The potential of wind power is certainly appreciated by the generating industry here in Queensland. I know that those generators looking at alternative sustainable energy have mapped the potential for wind to generate energy here in Queensland. I am aware of projects being proposed in places as diverse as the Gold Coast, Gladstone and even parts of the eastern downs. So wherever there is enough wind to warrant it, it is being seriously looked at.

**Mr HOPPER:** I have one further comment on that: 70,000 cars have already visited that site up north this year, so they certainly make good tourist attractions. Minister, would you consider placing a bounty on feral pigs and wild cats? The wildlife both these animals are destroying is unbelievable. The member for Keppel mentioned also the threat of foot-and-mouth disease with feral pigs. I think we should register all cats or dispose of them. If you want a cat, you can register it; it is as simple as that.

**Mr WELLS:** First of all, can I comment on the remark you made about them being tourist attractions? That is right. It is an important part of this that we should also promote them, so that when we say to people, 'Come to one of these remote national parks,' we also say to them, 'And you can see the alternative energy.' We are combining the green with the clean, and we are using our national parks as exemplars of the way you can avoid polluting the environment.

With respect to the bounty question that you just asked me—this is not actually a matter for me. This is a matter for the Minister for Natural Resources. It is not for me to tell him what he should do with respect to those kinds of things.

**Mr HOPPER:** Okay.

**Mr LESTER:** Minister, I refer to the MPS, page 13, dealing with wildlife and parks management. On the 5 p.m. news today rural fire services warned of a looming fire disaster potentially as bad as in 1994.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Are you telepathic? The 5 p.m. news was on when we were sitting in here.

**Mr LESTER:** What fire prevention measures has or will the EPA put into place to ensure public and property will be safeguarded? These fires go through national parks, of course.

**Mr WELLS:** In those circumstances and others we combine with local rural fire services in order to achieve the best result. We do use, in our national parks and forested areas, fire when it is necessary as a preventive measure. Controlled burns are occasionally used. There have been circumstances in which we have worked closely with neighbours in order to achieve an outcome as far as fire is concerned.

In a major wildfire event last year, when a fire from a neighbouring property burned across Blackdown Tableland National Park into adjoining properties, the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service—and this is something you would know of well, I think, personally—was strongly defended by neighbours against criticism, because the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service typically works side by side with their neighbours and the rural fire units to manage fires in the many districts in which parks are located.

It is not always appreciated that members of the Rural Fire Service are unpaid volunteers. This is the International Year of the Volunteer. The rural fire brigades, along with the local SES units, are voluntary workers and, as such, they frequently have a sense of ownership of our local national parks that other people would not necessarily have. It makes it very easy for the environment department to work with them.

I might mention that approximately three-quarters of our park rangers who have relevant job descriptions are trained in fire management. Obviously, fire is a natural phenomenon that you cannot avoid completely, but what we can do is work as well as we can with neighbours and with rural fire brigades in order to control the negative effects of it.

**Mr LESTER:** We could pursue the good neighbour policy. Minister, I note your answer to a previous question regarding the cost of each national park to the taxpayer. In your answer you referred to the fluid nature of national parks, with particular regard to staffing. While I accept that fact, I ask: is it not possible to project a basic amount of funding excluding employee expenses? And further, can you give me an indication of the cost of each national park last year? Now, I realise that might be a bit much to ask right across-the-board, so you might like to provide that answer on notice.

**Mr WELLS:** Could you explain again exactly the breakdown that you want? I mean, I can tell you now that the base rate is \$5.50 per hectare.

**Mr LESTER:** We are talking about each individual national park.

**Mr WELLS:** The base rate is \$5.50 per hectare. Then you add on the costs of such things as disasters. Now, what disasters should I budget for in each particular national park? Or should I envisage in my mind one massive disaster occurring to all our national parks and then divide it by 400,000? I mean, how do I work this sum out?

**Mr LESTER:** If you are running a number of businesses, you know what each business costs to run. I am simply asking for a simple equation—and I do not necessarily need it right here—of what each national park costs the taxpayer.

**Mr WELLS:** I know that you would like me to take the question on notice and come back to you with some further statistics. I know that that is what you would like. What I am saying to you is that the statistics would be so inchoate as to be meaningless. I can give you the base level, and I can give you the additional

imponderables that you might put on top of that. But we are not dealing here with a business, we are dealing here with nature itself. We are dealing with a very considerable part of the surface of this state—terrestrial and marine. You cannot do it like that. I cannot tell you what a disaster is going to cost per hectare, but I can give a budget for a disaster. I cannot tell you whether the disaster is going to happen in the Mount Etna National Park in your electorate or whether it is going to happen at the nature refuge at the end of Ogg Road in my electorate. I will invite the director of the Parks and Wildlife Service to add to that.

**Dr McPHAIL:** The parks service does obviously cost things out to its smallest management units. In some cases the management units are a park, but in many cases we have a management unit that is responsible for a number of parks. Hence the difficulty of giving an actual per park figure, even though \$5.50 is the estimated expenditure per hectare.

We are now responsible for 11.5 million hectares of parks and forests, and 3.5 million of that 11.5 million is forest reserve. Our costs range from \$16 per hectare in the highly visited parks of the south-east through to an estimated \$1 to \$1.50 per hectare for parks on Cape York Peninsula, which are very remote. So the variation in expenditure for parks depends a great deal on the level of infrastructure that we have to provide.

The per hectare figure itself is in some ways a first estimate for Queensland. In the past, it was not a figure that we have attempted to apply. It is applied around Australia, but it varies greatly from state to state.

Under the Australian and New Zealand Environment and Conservation Ministerial Council attempts have been made to come up with indexes that give some idea of relative expenditure per state. But in New South Wales the National Parks and Wildlife Service is a separate department, so it counts all of its administrative costs in its per hectare figures. In this state, like other states, our administrative costs are borne by a larger department and, therefore, we do not use the same figures. If we had added the equity and depreciation into last year's figure, we would have achieved \$5.60 not \$5.50 per hectare in expenditure.

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you very much. I still think that we can do a bit more in that regard and I would like to put that request forward. Have you any budgetary measures to compensate local governments for the loss of rate revenue when previously rateable land becomes a national park in consideration of the financial hardships this often causes? If not, do you anticipate any such compensation? I refer to some of the shires in the far west where some of the major acquisitions have been responsible—I will not say up to one quarter—for a very, very large part of that shire. That means that a great amount of that shire is without rate revenue anymore. Secondly, the roads to get to it are often then the responsibility of the council. It is a very real problem, particularly in far-western shires, which I have had representations from both this year and in previous times.

**Mr WELLS:** No government in history has ever compensated local councils in Queensland for the fact that they have a national park in their area. One of the reasons for that is that it is swings and roundabouts. If you have a national park in your area, it dramatically increases the number of people going to your area and generally it dramatically increases the amount of tourism to your area. That is why councils are falling over themselves from time to time to get a certain area nominated as a national park.

There are, however, some ways in which we can pursue the kind of idea that you have in mind. I have just been given a note here. Research has shown that the Noosa National Park, for example—and I know that this is a particularly spectacular one—is worth \$57 million to the local economy. So, as I said, it is swings and roundabouts. However, there are circumstances in which we are prepared to enter into a partnership with local councils. We can be joint managers with the local councils. We can pay them sums of money to enable them to do that so that they can benefit both ways. But as for rate rebates, no, that is not a traditional way of doing business and it is not something that recommends itself to me at first blush.

**Mr LESTER:** Yes, you certainly cannot compare Noosa to Diamantina, which is a very different situation where huge portions have been taken out. They just do not have the base of revenue to compensate that. But when you are talking about partnerships, that could perhaps be a solution to this problem. If we have made some progress there, that is very good.

**Mr WELLS:** I take your point and when I referred to Noosa I said that this was a particularly spectacular park.

**Mr LESTER:** It is a different case altogether.

**Mr WELLS:** It is different. However, the Diamantina is part of the Simpson Desert. The Simpson Desert has certain attractions and attracts certain numbers of people as a result of those attractions. I will give the director of Wildlife and Parks the opportunity to add to that.

**Dr McPHAIL:** I just make the point that the desert parks of South Australia, north-western New South Wales and the Simpson Desert National Park in Queensland have approximately 30,000 visitors a year and, therefore, are contributing to the local small towns in those areas. So already it is making a significant contribution.

I add that, for instance, in Taroom shire we have been working very closely with the shire council in getting a piece of land that is declared national park but purchasing a lease in order to provide for a new camping area, and the involvement of the council has been total in organising that change. I think that we will be doing a great deal for that shire. The reason for that is, of course, they wish to attract that very large number of tourists—I think that we are called grey nomads these days; that does not apply to me, I do not think—who, in fact, contribute a great deal to local economies, particularly during the winter period as they travel through the outback. Taroom shire is one of those that has grasped the opportunity to work with us to create a tourist destination in their shire.

**Mr WELLS:** So the bottom line is that it is not on the agenda.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questioning by non-government members has expired. I call on the member for Pumicestone.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On page 19 of the MPS you mention land acquisition of critical coastal lands. You would be aware of my continued interest in this area. I take this opportunity to pay tribute to you, minister, and your staff for your effort in protecting our coastline. Just how much land has the coastal acquisition fund protected?

**Mr WELLS:** I can understand the interest of the honourable member for Pumicestone in this matter because one of the areas that have been acquired under the acquisition fund is one Godwin Beach, which is in her electorate. The other one on Bribie Island—the addition to the national park there that was acquired under this particular fund—is also slap-bang in the middle of her electorate. The other

areas that have been acquired so far were Bargara, South Stradbroke Island and some land on the cassowary coast.

I recently went to the Gold Coast to announce the securing of the land at South Stradbroke Island. That will now become a permanent part of the national estate. This dramatic piece of Queensland's beauty and grandeur, which you can see across the water from the Gold Coast, will be there for all generations. But before I allow myself to become even more deeply moved by the beauties, wonders and marvels of nature that we have acquired, I would like to ask Olwyn Crimp if she would come and speak further to the committee.

**Ms CRIMP:** Yes. Since the coastal acquisition fund was established in 1998-99 to acquire coastal land sensitive for development, there has been \$6.25 million allocated to the initiative since then and a total of \$8.75 million for the four-year term. To date, there has been more than \$2.5 million of coastal acquisitions that the minister has referred to in areas such as Pumicestone Passage; blocks at Bargara to allow access to the Woongarra National Park, which previously had no public access; bushland at Godwin Beach, South Stradbroke; and there has also been funds put aside and paid out for the previous commitment on the Emanuel land in the Sunshine Coast area. The EPA is currently negotiating on a number of potential acquisitions which are in excess of \$6 million.

The program has been working particularly with local governments and has worked with all the coastal local governments to try to have them put up blocks of land which have planning interests for use in the coastal acquisition program. The program is particularly looking to provide such things as beach access so the public can utilise the coast. It is looking for areas with high conservation value. It is also looking at areas that may prevent inappropriate coastal development—areas like coastal hazards, or storm irrigation inundation, or areas prone to erosion.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On page 9 of the MPS you mention preparing a biodiversity strategy for Queensland. What action have you taken to protect biodiversity in south-east Queensland.

**Mr WELLS:** I would like to draw the committee's attention to the connection between the Smart State and biodiversity. One of the essential ingredients for biotechnology is the variety of raw materials and in a place like Queensland, where we have one of the areas of most significant diversity in the world, that is a pretty good place to have the Smart State. One of the initiatives that we took with respect to this was the regional forest agreement. Honourable members will be aware that we debated the implementation of that landmark agreement in the parliament not very long ago.

Another initiative is the measures that we have taken recently to save endangered species. Only the other day I was up in the cassowary coast announcing the rescue package for the mahogany glider, which from memory involved the acquisition of 3,250 hectares of land, which was the habitat of the mahogany glider, and also a breeding program which we are undertaking at Fleays wildlife park.

I would like to take the opportunity to advise the committee that I actually started this breeding program in the sense that I presided at the wedding of the mahogany gliders that were the first ever to be kept in captivity for the purpose of breeding. The male glider's name was Hogany and the females' names were Blossom and Milo. I actually performed the wedding between Hogany and Blossom and Milo. The reason they got a minister of the Crown to do this was that they could not get a

minister of religion to do anything so unorthodox. I performed this wedding on Easter Saturday. I am very pleased to advise the committee that Blossom now has a baby.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Hear, hear!

**Mr WELLS:** This is the world's first successful breeding program of the mahogany glider. Of course, the only place that you would find mahogany gliders anyway is in Queensland. We also saved the bilby a little while ago. The hairy-nosed wombat was even more extreme. We had to use the techniques of in-vitro fertilisation and surrogate motherhood in order to get that population going again. But that is what we are doing. These interesting species, as well as many others, are preserved by the processes of land acquisition as well as the more dramatic and rather quirky types of things that you have to do to save species like the hairy-nosed wombat. So there is an enormous variety of strategies. I wish that I had more time to talk about that, because if I did, and if the honourable member would like to persist with this particular line of questioning—

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I move for an extension.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Yes, granted. Two minutes.

**Mr WELLS:** I will ask Olwyn Crimp to come and talk about the biodiversity strategy before I get carried away with these threatened species.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Between Hogany the bigamist—

**Mr WELLS:** I am not recommending it to the committee. We might look at it if the species was threatened with extinction, but I am not recommending it as a general rule.

**Mr CUMMINS:** You do end up with two mothers-in-law, though.

**Mr WELLS:** I will warn Hogany about that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Order!

**Mr WELLS:** I am sorry.

**Ms CRIMP:** The most significant step forward for biodiversity protection in south-east Queensland has been the South East Queensland Forest Agreement with over 400,000 hectares of land being transferred to a level of protection under the Nature Conservation Act. The land includes 12 endangered, or of concern, regional ecosystems in addition to the habitat of a range of rare, threatened or endemic species. Other small-scale actions are also taking place. This includes the Land for Wildlife program, which has been successful. There has been 103 properties in south-east Queensland that have entered into the program in 2001 and that has provided 1,962 hectares of additional wildlife habitat.

These actions have also been further enhanced, as I mentioned before, with the acquisition through the coastal acquisition fund of 240 hectares of land. Other things that have been occurring, too, have included the regional nature conservation strategy for south-east Queensland. A draft was released in February 2001. It is looking at an assessment of the remaining vegetation in south-east Queensland and providing a strategy and framework to allow local governments to better plan for the area.

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, on page 269 of the MPS you mentioned that QPWS will continue the capital works and park maintenance program. What are the priorities

for spending the additional \$10 million announced in the budget for the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service?

<sup>030</sup> **Mr WELLS:** We are going to be employing up to 140 additional rangers on our national parks. As I think I mentioned in response to a question from the honourable member for Keppel, the responsibilities of those rangers is going to be fire, ferals, weeds, wildlife management and visitor infrastructure management. Those are going to be the main areas of responsibility for those additional rangers. I will invite Bob Speirs to speak about that.

**Mr SPEIRS:** This is probably one of the most important things that has happened for us for as long as I can recall. This \$10 million is about additional expenditure for the employment of field staff across the state and will add to the operational resources to deliver enhanced park and wildlife management across the state.

The investment will be directed at priority areas, with funding decisions based on the need to achieve statutory service, delivery requirements for conservation and visitor management. As the minister said, there will be up to 140 rangers, but that \$10 million has to be balanced to provide the necessary operating funding for those rangers so that they are effective and we get the real results on the ground. In the first year, with a lead time, we are looking at, in fact, boosting some of that operating funding to get this well established quickly. We would be anticipating that the full program will be on the ground by the end of 2002.

The initiative also focuses on the priority areas of natural resource management. That is an area identified both by the reports that have been done and through the LGAQ inquiry into national parks as areas where we could be doing a better job. This is very much focused on natural resource management, as well as visitor management—that is, providing visitor services and visitor infrastructure—building indigenous partnerships with people across the state and also on wildlife management.

The new rangers will be distributed across the three regions. We are anticipating that all of the 80 positions that we will be able to put into place this year will be in district areas supporting park work directly. Some of those positions will be used to pick up the Boral staff being redeployed out of the SEQFA initiative. The implementation initiative will also be enhanced by a number of business development and systems development projects that we have going.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 5 of the MPS under the departmental financial summary, note 2 mentions machinery of government changes. What changes in responsibility for the EPA have resulted from the MOG changes and what are the benefits to Queensland?

**Mr WELLS:** The major part of the machinery of government changes that have the effect of significantly enhancing the size and the potency of the Environmental Protection Agency were the transfer of the Office of Sustainable Energy to the EPA, the transfer of the regional landscape strategy and the Cape York Peninsula land use strategy, plus the number of natural resources officers in charge of forestry. These were very significant, indeed, in terms of configuring the department in a way that it could address the problem. If I could, by way of example, I will speak of the Sustainable Energy Office. Now that we have a Sustainable Industries Division which includes that particular function, we are able to take a different posture from any previous Environment Department.

In the past, all too often Environment Departments have been perceived as departments that simply say, 'No.' We can now say, 'No, but you can do it this way,' and that is the configuration that the Sustainable Industries Division now gives us. I will ask Brian Carroll if he would speak to us further about the machinery of government changes.

**Mr CARROLL:** In addition to some of the matters that the minister has indicated as a result of the MOG changes, our department and the Environmental Protection Agency set up a transition team and an implementation team to drive the change on behalf of the government. As mentioned, the Office of Sustainable Energy, the water recycling strategy and the regional landscape strategy, as well as a number of matters on the cape, were transferred to the EPA to help streamline the government's environmental management program.

In addition, the influence has increased the role of the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service in terms of the expanded integration of its charter of sustainable forest management and equitable access to safe recreational opportunities in state forests. The other significant change for us as an organisation is that the size of the organisation has grown. In terms of our operational budget, it has increased by \$65 million. In terms of our staffing and our resources, it has increased by 344. Another major change for the organisation is assets. Our assets increased by \$398 million, which is fairly significant and now means that the organisation has assets well over \$1 billion.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 1 of the MPS, you mention that state forests now form part of the QPWS charter. What are the benefits of transferring the management of state forests and timber reserves to QPWS?

**Mr WELLS:** The main benefit is the commonsense one. The management strategies that you would need to use for forest reserves or timber reserves involve the same ecological understandings and the same skills as are required for the management of national parks. Consequently, we have a pooling of reserves that gives us economies of scale and a critical mass of people that allows cross-insemination of ideas. As a result of that, we have the capacity to do the job even better than the government was previously able to do it. The machinery of government changes have been extremely valuable and they were extremely far-sighted. I would ask Geoff Clare if he would speak a little further to the committee with respect to the forests and timber aspect.

**Mr CLARE:** The main benefits of the transfer lie, as the minister said, in improving the overall cohesion and efficiency of the management of Queensland's natural areas. There are four million hectares of state forests and timber reserves in Queensland. As has been referred to previously, if that is put together with the lands already managed by the Parks and Wildlife Service, that makes some 11.5 million hectares, which is seven per cent of Queensland. Those lands generally are managed in a similar manner with similar management challenges. As the minister said, dealing with those challenges does require a similar understanding—a fundamental understanding—of natural processes. They also have common clients in terms of the users of those forests and areas: ecotourism operators, outdoor recreationists and other users such as beekeepers and foliage collectors.

Specifically, the benefits would include the opportunity to better coordinate the protection of those areas and to plan and provide for the diversity of access opportunities that the community is seeking from them. It will also allow better consistency of policy and management activities across those tenures. It will have logistical efficiency and critical mass benefits. There will be a more efficient use of

capital infrastructure and equipment. It will also remove duplication and double handling, particularly in terms of permits, for instance, for commercial operators who use both sets of lands. Overall, there are benefits for the management of the estate for the users and the clients of that estate and also for staff. I particularly refer to safety benefits of having staff being able to work as groups and in more than one park location.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions by government members has expired. I call on the member for Keppel.

**Mr LESTER:** How many rangers per park would be trained in fire management, and do those rangers have the appropriate protective clothing in which to fight fires should they occur?

**Mr WELLS:** The number of rangers per park that are trained in fire management is a subset of the number of rangers per park. I have already told you that the number of rangers per park is going to vary because no ranger works on only one park. However, I can say to you that three-quarters of the rangers, including all of the rangers whose job description puts them in the way of having to have those skills do have those skills. They have all been trained. All those who need to be trained have been trained in fire management and they have also been trained in cooperation with rural fire brigades and in personnel management, as far as the people who are visiting natural parks are concerned should there be a fire incident at that time. The answer to the second part of your question is yes.

**Mr LESTER:** So there is specific clothing that they can use should there be a fire?

**Mr WELLS:** I am advised.

**Mr LESTER:** How does the training happen? Is it taught by the fire brigade people? What is the course?

**Mr WELLS:** I will get the appropriate departmental officer who is able to give you a description of the process of the training that is being undertaken at the moment. That is Bob Speirs.

**Mr SPEIRS:** Fire management, as you know, is a critical element. Close liaison continues with the bushfire management agencies in Queensland, particularly the rural fires division of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. To cut to the chase, we do our training in consultation with the rural fires people. We have our own training program. We also rate our staff depending on their level of training. The equipment that we provide is as close as we can get to state of the art. Our new uniform includes fire-protective clothing. That is available to all of our staff. All of our staff involved in the fire-front work are properly equipped. The equipment is regularly checked. It is kept within specifications. In recent years we have changed the vehicles that are capable of carrying the slip-on units and so forth. The provision for the protection of our staff so that they can do an excellent job in fire management is something that we work on very closely in our own capacity but also in a very close working relationship with the local governments and the rural fire authority.

**Mr LESTER:** If a fire broke out in the Blackdown Tableland, where would that fire unit be to access it quickly?

**Mr WELLS:** The same rural fire brigade that handled the last one, with the same rangers or rangers drawn from the same place as handled the last one, to public acclaim.

**Mr LESTER:** So really the national parks has not got its own equipment?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. The national parks has its own equipment, own protective clothing and own rangers who are trained in fire management. That is why earlier on I referred to you, not just because I know you have a sentimental attachment to the place but because it was a conspicuous example of cooperation between the rural fire brigades and the rangers, which everybody in your area thought was done extremely well. The director of parks and wildlife would like to speak further.

**Dr McPHAIL:** All of our management units, and of course Blackdown Tableland National Park is a separate management unit because of its size, have the drop-down equipment that drops onto the tray of an appropriately modified vehicle, so we have, if you like, a utility with the appropriate equipment that can be dropped onto it immediately. If you go into our workshops and storage sheds, you will find the equipment up on hoists, ready to be dropped onto the vehicles. As Mr Speirs has said, we also provide full clothing for the work, full equipment and we also try to ensure that in any extended wildfire we make sure that other rangers from other parts of the immediate region are cycled through to provide relief and assistance.

<sup>031</sup> **Mr LESTER:** Would that drop-down equipment be based in Rockhampton or at the base at Blackdown Tableland?

**Dr McPHAIL:** It is at the headquarters of the Blackdown Tableland National Park. That is the case for all of our equipment. It is field located, not centrally located.

**Mr WELLS:** I invite you to drop in on your way home, or some time next week, to the Blackdown National Park to check it out. We will make arrangements for you to come. Bob will make sure that that is arranged for Vince.

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you for the invitation. I will be out there as soon as I can. I am not too sure about next Monday.

**Mr WELLS:** I am sorry, I was not applying for a job as your PA. I would not presume to tell you when you should do things. I just offer an open invitation.

**Mr LESTER:** Thank you. Due to the serious underfunding over many years of national parks throughout Queensland, which has been seriously letting down the side in regard to pest and weed control, creating serious ongoing problems for neighbouring land-holders and local councils, could you guarantee to the committee that real progress will be made towards national parks throughout Queensland becoming good neighbours? Can you please specify targets which must be met by the end of this year in order to achieve this aim? Do we have an ongoing plan to make things better?

**Mr WELLS:** In answer to the honourable member for Keppel, I cannot guarantee anything. This is human affairs. They are not subject to guarantee. We are not doing mathematics here. What I can say is that we do have a good neighbour policy. We have a very large number of instances where the good neighbour policy has worked resoundingly well. The Caboolture shire has recently agreed to extend the trusteeship agreement covering six conservation parks for five years, taking on the day-to-day management of this important conservation/recreation area in a whole range of areas. The good neighbour policy has been working in such a way that the neighbours, whether they be local councils or private landowners, get enormous benefits out of the association with the national parks.

As I have said to you, I accept your point. It is a perfectly valid point, and it is indeed a bipartisan point, that there are weeds and feral animals in national parks. Successive governments have wrestled with that problem, but none as energetically

as this government is about to do. This year we have a program for putting on 80 additional rangers. That is going to make a difference. I have told the committee twice so far that those rangers' first priority is going to be the control of weeds, ferals and fire. As well as that, the weeds and feral animal control program—on top of those additional rangers—is \$1.2 million. These things are going to make a difference. But we have to talk here about evolutionary changes. We cannot talk about fixing it all in one go. There is no way that hundreds of thousands of hectares can be cleared of weeds and ferals in one go. The work of nature over decades cannot be ameliorated just by one government in one term of office putting in a large number of people to control weeds and ferals. I will invite another departmental officer to speak further to the matter.

**Dr McPHAIL:** We have a number of strategies in place—a number of approaches in place—to try to make certain that we handle these issues systematically. We are just completing a master planning process. We have already got a fire management strategy—

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time is up. Mr Lester, would you like to give Dr McPhail an extension?

**Mr LESTER:** I will ask another question and he can then incorporate that in the answer. What I am suggesting really is not about being the world's greatest mathematician or one goal. I am simply asking: have we got goals, projections and time slots as to when these particular goals might be achieved? I am the first to admit that this has been a problem over a long time. I am also the first to admit that it will not be fixed immediately. But it is a problem and I just need to know if we have certain projections. That is normally the way we go about things. There has been a bit of waffle with this answer. I would like to think that the minister can give me some reasonable projections, that is all.

**Mr WELLS:** If you take out the political commentary in the question, what you have got is a request that we should set certain goals, such that we will get rid of 90 per cent of the ferals in a particular national park within a particular number of years. The truth is that you practically have to get rid of 90 per cent of the ferals in a particular national park in order to prevent the population from resuming the ecosystem.

The best answer to your question lies in the good neighbour policy. For example, there was a systematic pig control program established for Lochern National Park near Longreach in consultation with park neighbours. This involves a comprehensive feeding and baiting program linked with systematic monitoring. Neighbours who attended the recent management group meeting in the area were enthusiastic and supportive of the work being undertaken. The feral goat control program in place in Bladensburg National Park has been acknowledged by the mayor of Winton shire as leading this type of work in the shire. The parkinsonia control program in the same park is being undertaken in cooperation with the Lake Ayr Basin Coordinating Committee. For residential properties abutting Noosa National Park cooperative fire management is essential. Queensland Parks and Wildlife staff have constructed fire breaks and have worked to develop strong relationships with neighbours, who now actively maintain the breaks by reducing fuel build-up and mowing. As a result of that relationship, neighbours are also actively involved in reporting any illegal use of or illegal activities operating in the park.

I could go on multiplying instances of where the department has taken energetic action to attack the problem of ferals. I will now ask Bob Speirs if he would add to what I have just said.

**Mr SPEIRS:** These works that the minister has been discussing have been based upon the pragmatic implementation of some of the underlying systems that we are putting in place. As you would be aware, the Local Government Association and others have been looking at the way we do business. As a result of that, we have been able to start to rebuild the foundations on which we do our management assessment. We have a pilot program in place for the assessment of management effectiveness. We have run that on about five parks—in some of the western parks as well as in the Whitsundays—to get a measure on how well the parks are being managed in terms of the natural resource management of fire, weeds and feral animals, and also visitor management. We are building an integrated management system which will provide the sorts of guidelines that you are speaking about.

**Mr HOPPER:** As we all know, Brisbane's waste water is being pumped into the ocean. I know the general public are not happy about this. The perfect alibi is to send it to the Darling Downs, where the farmers would kindly have the people of Brisbane relieve themselves of this worry. As Minister for Environment, will you promote this project?

**Mr WELLS:** This is something which is the subject of examination by government at the moment. The position I would be taking would be the whole-of-government position when that position was formulated. The idea of water recycling is fully supported. The question of whether a particular recycling program is going to work is one that would have to be determined in all the circumstances of the case. I will ask Alan Feely to say a little bit more about the Environment Protection Agency's role in respect of this particular proposal.

**Mr FEELY:** The EPA is in support of water recycling projects. We have done substantial work with the interagency committee to help promote that particular project, including offering to house a small working group to facilitate it a little quicker. There are a number of issues with it regarding salinity and wet weather storage, but we believe they will probably be managed in the long term.

**Mr HOPPER:** Could you repeat the last bit?

**Mr FEELY:** There are a number of issues regarding salinity of the water which we believe are resolvable and there are also a number of issues regarding wet weather storage size. Again, we believe they are resolvable. But we are just doing some joint work with the other agencies to get a whole-of-government final position on that.

**Mr WELLS:** What the officer is pointing out here is technical difficulties that are involved in a particular program. What I said at the start of the question is that, subject to the resolution of those technical difficulties, a particular program may be supported. It would need to be a decision taken at whole-of-government level. That would be supported. But there will be technical difficulties involved in each case, and each case needs to be considered in great detail on its merits. The role of the Environmental Protection Agency in the context of such programs is the one that you are speaking of—to provide environmental advice. The advice that would be provided would be of the technical kind.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to dot point 1, 'Future Developments', on page 14 of the MPS, which states 'Prepare a policy paper on proposed legislative changes to the Nature Conservation Regulation 1994' to increase the effectiveness of the

management of recreational and commercial use of wildlife. I ask: how is this an improvement on last year's future direction to review this regulation? Have there been any changes to this system?

**Mr WELLS:** It is an improvement by virtue of the fact that we have conducted a public consultation. The matter is, as a result of that that, much further advanced. I will invite Ian McPhail to speak further.

**Dr McPHAIL:** There was a public consultation carried out by Mr Lester Manning, a lawyer, into the community's views—the very widely differing community's views in relation to the management of the wildlife park. We are now considering the submissions that are being made and Mr Manning will make a report to us at the end of that. We will then be in a position to recommend to the minister what changes might be made. I am sure the honourable member is aware that there are vastly contrasting views in the community about the keeping of wildlife, the care of injured wildlife and trade in wildlife. Those views have already been expressed in the public consultation so far. It was delayed slightly because we had a close timetable that was interrupted by events in February which required us to delay the process. But the public consultation has now concluded and we plan to have within a month a recommendation to the minister in relation to the submissions that have been made.

**Mr LESTER:** Further to the previous question, have there been any changes to the issuing of damage mitigation permits in recent years? Can you specify these changes and how many damage mitigation permits were issued each year for the previous three years and for what reasons?

**Mr WELLS:** I am not sure whether I have the total number of damage mitigation permits here. Has any officer got the total number of damage mitigation permits? I know that there were 18 with respect to electric grids for flying foxes, if that is what you would like me to refer to in detail. Is that what you were driving at?

**Mr LESTER:** Yes.

**Mr WELLS:** Shall we cut to the chase straight away?

**Mr LESTER:** The kangaroos.

**Mr WELLS:** I do not have the numbers with me for kangaroos. Has anybody got that figure here, or will I take this one on notice? It is 700,000 for kangaroos.

**Dr McPHAIL:** That is the permitted, not the actual number taken, which is far less.

**Mr LESTER:** If you feel you need to answer that question any more directly, I am quite happy to take any further comments when you are ready. I note on page 14—

**The CHAIRMAN:** Excuse me, the time for questioning by non-government members has expired.

**Mr CUMMINS:** I will put it on record that in my opinion you have had a pretty easy time thus far and I hope you are ready for that to change. On pages 2 and 14 of the MPS you say that you will complete the transition of the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement. Can you advise on the progress of implementing the South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement and how communities and forest users are being consulted, please?

**Mr WELLS:** I am lost for words here. Can I ask the executive director of Parks and Wildlife Service for a response?

**Dr McPHAIL:** I apologise. I was caught up in a small unofficial subcommittee meeting to my right. The South-East Queensland Regional Forest Agreement is designed to bring some 425,000 hectares of land under the Nature Conservation Act. The vast majority of this amount has already been brought in under the new protected area category in the Nature Conservation Act called forest reserve, but it is still managed under the Forestry Act, although now of course it is managed by the QPWS in its new form using the Forestry Act. The minister has the appropriate parts of that act referred to him.

The processes require very considerable community consultation and, as I am sure members are aware, there has been a variety of debate over access by recreational groups to the former forest areas. We have community consultative groups operating in the Boyne Valley, Blackdown Tablelands, Eurimbula, Bunya Mountains, Mount Walsh, Numinbah, Main Range and Dularcha areas. Some of these are now quite advanced in their deliberations. We would expect to be able to recommend soon to the committee headed by the Minister for State Development those lands which can be moved into tenures under the Nature Conservation Act.

**Mr CUMMINS:** With further reference to the machinery of government changes that are mentioned on page 5 of the MPS notes under Departmental Financial Summary, I believe that the responsibilities for implementing land use planning on Cape York Peninsula were also transferred as part of the machinery of government. Could you please advise what progress has been made in implementing the recommendation of the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Study?

**Mr WELLS:** Actually, the other day I went to Cairns and I spoke to the Cape York Regional Advisory Group. I indicated to them at that time that there were going to be six extra rangers employed on Cape York parks in this financial year, that \$800,000 was going to be spent on park infrastructure and facilities on the cape this financial year as part of the continuing Better Parks Program and \$2.2 million in wages and operational expenditure was going to be made available to the cape this financial year. I was able to give them that and other good news. I would like to ask the director-general if he would take the matter further.

**Mr PURTILL:** With the machinery of government changes, the Environmental Protection Agency has assumed the lead agency role, as you mentioned, for land use planning. We have taken on board two areas of what was called the Cape York Peninsula Land Use Strategy—CYPLUS. They are components of the Cape York Natural Heritage Trust as well as the strategy itself. That strategy has developed into an action plan which has been relabelled the CYP2010 program. Of course, the target date for achieving the land use planning strategy outcomes is 2010, hence the name.

In addition to those machinery of government changes, the Environmental Protection Agency wants to play its part in the importance of sustainable land use planning on the cape. We have dedicated a Cape York unit, which has been put together with components of the machinery of government in addition to other resources, to have a dedicated project manager for Cape York, particularly through this early land use planning phase.

The Cape York Regional Advisory Group—CYRAG—was also re-established, which related to the meetings held yesterday that the minister referred to. We have been very encouraged by their positive responses to the EPA's lead agency role in progressing the CYP2010 program. Some of the major achievements to date of the program on the cape have been the establishment of the economic sector steering committee, which will oversee the assessment of economic potential for primary

industries on Cape York Peninsula. It has also facilitated seven subregional community forum workshops in recognition of the fact that, although people refer to the Cape York as having unique and individual needs, it actually has many diverse needs and they need to be recognised. We also have support for the assessment of the natural heritage significance of Cape York Peninsula. We have endorsed the beef industry strategy report and numerous other reports for Cape York.

**Mr CUMMINS:** I would like to refer the minister back to the renewable energy systems in Queensland mentioned on page 1 of the MPS, and I think it is the second bottom dot point. I believe Dr John Cole has already touched on the issue, but could I ask: what has been the take-up rate for the Remote Area Power Scheme?

**Mr WELLS:** So far I think we have seven already in place and two being put in place at the moment, bringing the total to nine. We have an aspiration for another 30-odd—perhaps 37—in the very near future, either this coming year or in subsequent years. These are going to be in the national parks which are typically off-grid and therefore at the moment using diesel and other forms of polluting fuels.

There is a certain elegance in the fact that Smart State technology is going to be attached to the pristine naturalness of our national parks. I think that we should be the standard bearers of this. Of course, the national parks are not going to be the only beneficiaries or repositories of the alternative technology. Under the RAPS program we are providing them also to other remote and isolated users. I will invite Dr John Cole to come back and add to what I have said.

**Dr COLE:** As the minister has outlined, the parks component of our Renewable Energy Program is a significant opportunity for us to demonstrate the use of renewable energy and its utility in remote areas of Queensland. It is walking the talk. The program is very much in accordance with our energy policy and is targeted at supporting renewable and innovative energy technologies in remote areas. The minister has already outlined the objectives in terms of progressively converting all our remote and off-grid national park facilities to solar power and energy efficient appliances. It means reduced energy usage. It certainly means decreased reliance on diesel fuel and provides an effective electricity supply to remote users. For the industry itself, it provides a very good opportunity to demonstrate their goods and services right in the middle of the market.

The benefits of the program mean a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by these facilities by up to 76 per cent. It means improved energy management on the parks and it means that there is a 70 per cent renewable energy contribution for all electrical and heating functions in our remote off-grid protected area facilities. It is estimated that the total annual cost to operate and maintain the 34 remote and off-grid national parks entirely by diesel generated power is something like \$800,000 a year.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Minister, you and many within your department know that I have a healthy passion or obsession regarding better use of treated effluent sewage waste water, especially on the Sunshine Coast. In my lifetime I hope to see both the Mooloolah River and Kawana ocean outfalls closed. On page 8 under Recent Achievements of the MPS you mention that the draft Queensland water recycling strategy was released for public consultation in October last year. In your opening remarks tonight you touched upon water quality and your department's ongoing investigations into numerous initiatives being investigated. Can you please advise on the progress of the water recycling strategy?

**Mr WELLS:** I acknowledge your interest in this area. I have received a number of representations from you as well as questions on notice in the parliament. I am pleased to be able to advise the committee that we have 13 community demonstration plants going at the moment as well as two major demonstration projects. Those are at Pine Rivers and Springfield. The one at Springfield represents the fulfilment of an election undertaking, with a quarter of a million dollars of capital injection. I will ask John Cole if he would take this matter further for us.

**Dr COLE:** The government has a water recycling strategy almost finalised for release and, indeed, it is my understanding that later this month or within the month there will be cabinet consideration of the final draft of the strategy. It has been through a process of extensive consultation and, indeed, a draft water recycling strategy released last year received and took account of 120 submissions.

The water recycling projects that are demonstrating the utility of this approach to water conservation, as the minister mentioned, are primarily located at Springfield, a new urban development in the south-west of Brisbane. We have a mobile waste water recycling demonstration facility at Pine Rivers designed particularly at the behest of the water industry not only to demonstrate our local technological capabilities but also to demonstrate to local government the utility of this kind of approach.

We hope to take advantage of the fact that the water recycling strategy is now housed within the Sustainable Industries Division. Indeed, it is our expectation that, in partnership with local government and Queensland industry, particularly through the partnerships that we have with up to 28 industry associations, we will roll out this strategy as a viable part of resource conservation and resource productivity. Perhaps a good example of the interest that we see at the community level was most recently reflected at Agnes Waters in central Queensland where, in partnership with the Miriam Vale Shire Council, with other departments of state and also other parts of the EPA, we have worked at a project that will almost be totally sustainable in the sense of water recycling and sustainable energy. It will set a new benchmark for sustainable community performance.

<sup>033</sup> The other thing that we can provide is the technical assurance of the program by our involvement in the cooperative research centre for water quality and treatment. We continue to be part of a national emphasis on working the technical opportunities out for water recycling.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On page 7 of the MPS it is mentioned that Environmental Operations is responsible for licensing standards. What has the EPA done to enforce licence conditions at AMH?

**Mr WELLS:** AMH is an abattoir that employs 1,500 people. It is a very significant employer. The problems there were noise and odour. This was a case that never actually came to a prosecution. An environment protection order to lower the noise and odour was given to the Dinmore plant. The end result of it was a negotiated outcome and a new environmental licence. That new environmental licence had conditions on it which had the effect of improving the environmental controls but at the same time allowing for the other significant objective of government—that is, an increase in employment. There has been a very recent development on that. I will ask Mark Williamson to come forward to give us that news hot off the press.

**Mr WILLIAMSON:** As the minister indicated, yesterday we signed a new licence with Australian Meat Holdings and also approved an environmental management

program which will provide some legally binding commitments in terms of works to improve environmental issues at AMH. Essentially, the new licence and the environmental management program will result in composting operations being removed from the site by the end of August this year. The composting operations were a major source of odour in particular on the site. In addition to that, the agreed commitments will result in about \$9.5 million being spent by AMH on improvements to noise, odour and water pollution matters. That is in addition to the \$22 million which it is spending on a new rendering plant, which is currently being constructed. The new rendering plant will provide significant improvements again in odour and noise. Overall, it is about \$31.5 million worth of works. Over the next 12 months we expect to see a very significant improvement in odour, noise and water issues.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for questions by government members has expired.

**Mr LESTER:** I note dot point 6 on page 14 of the MPS states that you will produce and progressively implement a master plan for Queensland's parks system. I note that section 3.2 of this plan refers to sustaining commercial and community services. Many businesses rely on consistent and reliable access to national parks for their operations, operations which provide Queensland with an opportunity to enjoy these great parks. Can you give a guarantee that sufficient access will be provided to commercial operators and that restrictions will not be enforced that will make these businesses unviable in that case? In other words, we do not want them to be restricted.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, to the extent that it is ecologically sustainable. Obviously nobody—and I would think the tourist operators themselves would be included in that universal—would wish us to allow a national park or any natural wonder to be visited to the extent or in a way that actually damaged it so that it was no longer there. The pristine parts of our state, the more beautiful and the more ecologically interesting parts of our state, are also fragile. They are not, in many cases, in any immediate danger, but they would be if they were trampled over by 10 million tourists instead of 300,000 tourists a year, just to use an example.

The glow worm caves on the Gold Coast hinterland are visited by 300,000 people a year. That is sustainable, but 10 times that amount might not be sustainable. So it is always a question of what is sustainable. Sustainability is the point. That is why I cannot say to you, 'Here's a blanket guarantee. Anybody who wants to run a tour can go to anywhere they like.' I cannot give you that guarantee. But what I will say is that the Environmental Protection Agency is keen to ensure that sustainable tourism occurs. We are putting on additional rangers, part of whose function will be to increase visitor facilities and make visitor facilities more universally available in our national parks so that they can receive higher levels of visitation. I believe that we can have dramatically more visitations in most of our national parks than we now have, but those increases need to be catered for. The sustainability of them in each case needs to be monitored. It is a case-by-case thing.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to dot point 8 of page 14 of the MPS under 'Future Directions'. It states—

Finalise the draft document Marine Protected Areas in Queensland—a planning framework for consideration by stakeholders and the public.

Can you give a commitment that access to the Great Barrier Reef islands will be maintained under the marine park system and that commercial operators will not be handicapped by unreasonable restrictions? Further, could you please specify any restrictions which are likely to be placed on commercial operators and/or the

general public for access to national parks? There are operators in that area who are concerned at the moment.

**Mr WELLS:** I can give you an absolute guarantee that no commercial operator will be prevented from visiting any part of the marine park anywhere at any time because of unreasonable restrictions.

**Mr HOPPER:** I refer to dot point 3 on page 14, which states—

Nature search continued to operate Statewide, with more than 1,000 volunteers gathering valuable records on Queensland's flora and fauna.

You spoke in parliament about a koala hotline. Am I right? Was it a koala hotline?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, on 21 June.

**Mr HOPPER:** That is it. Good. It was to ring a certain number if you spotted a koala.

**Mr WELLS:** The number is ANIMAL.

**Mr HOPPER:** Have you considered targeting the areas where they are in abundance and perhaps making eucalypt trees available free of charge to those who live in the area so that they can plant those trees to increase those habitats?

**Mr WELLS:** What a good idea. We will take it on board.

**Mr HOPPER:** Because I am sure it would work. Thank you, Minister.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to dot point 3 of the MPS on page 14 under 'Future Directions', which says that you will recruit a further 100 youth traineeships. As confirmed in an answer to a question on notice, I notice that these 100 youth traineeships are not new but replacements for the 100 youth traineeships introduced last year. I ask: why is it that this year these 100 places are expected to cost \$4 million while last year they were only to cost \$2.1 million?

**Mr WELLS:** The answer to the second part is an accounting phenomenon. The answer to the first part is that they are new because they are different people. They are new people. This is a different lot of people being trained.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Not recycled.

**Mr WELLS:** No.

**Mr LESTER:** Would you like to explain that a bit better?

**Mr WELLS:** They are different human beings. One lot of human beings is now trained. Most of them, I am advised, have jobs or have been interviewed recently for jobs. There is another lot coming through. So that is why it is new. The answer to the second part of the question is an accounting phenomenon. The previous figure did not count input from another department, which was a contribution to the wages and salaries of those particular officers.

**Dr McPHAIL:** The total cost this year is the same as last year; that is, \$4.1 million in total. We get \$2 million given to us for the capital costs associated with it; that is, equipment, plant and materials. The Department of Training provides us with the money for the wages and salaries. That is the other part of the \$4.1 million. It is exactly the same from year to year.

**Mr LESTER:** In furtherance to the previous question, I ask: how many of the 100 youth trainees have dropped out of the program and for what reasons did they drop out? Have these non-completed positions been filled with replacement traineeships? In other words, if somebody dropped out, were they replaced?

**Mr WELLS:** There was 65 per cent retention for the whole of the period. The program is ongoing at the moment. I will invite the director-general to say a few more words about it.

**Mr PURTILL:** The program is in the middle of the year. It is a calendar year program. Our trainees will run through in this program until December. I would not be able to identify the actual numbers that drop out in any year, but we not only have very good retention rates during the program but also are placing people into further employment out of the traineeships from the last induction. I think 65 per cent have gone straight out of those programs. They are trainees that are targeted from specific disadvantaged groups. So that type of ongoing employment rate is very high. Like any group of 100 employees working anywhere, we do have some attrition. We do aim to replace them if practicable and if there are early drop-outs. As you can imagine, if people do drop out towards the end of a program it is less likely that they will be replaced, although, again, it is less likely that they will drop out if they have gone that far into the program.

**Mr LESTER:** I have officiated at a number of these programs. They are very good. I really emphasise that we must keep up this work. It gives an enormous amount of opportunity to some people who may not always find it that easy to get training. There has been a lot of good projects done as well. We need to pursue it.

**Mr WELLS:** Thank you. As well as Mount Etna and the tablelands, within the next X months or so we may have some further good news for your electorate and region.

**Mr LESTER:** We have had a very good one on Mulambin beach, too, which has gone over the mountain. That has been one heck of a project. That was a little while back, but they are very good. There was another project out towards Byfield which has been useful. If I am going to get some more for the Keppel electorate, that is even better still.

**Mr CUMMINS:** We could do with a couple down on the Sunshine Coast.

**Mr LESTER:** I will leave you a couple, but you will have to be nice to me. I refer to page 12 of the MPS under the 'Output Operating Statement' relating to environmental protection user charges. The adjustable budget identified \$1,495,000 but the estimated actual was \$1,780,000. It is also noted that only \$1 million has been estimated for the year 2001-02. Firstly, what caused the sharp escalation in user charges in the last financial year? Secondly, why is the estimate for the financial year nearly halved on last year's estimated actual?

**Mr WELLS:** I will refer that question to Kim Davis.

**Ms DAVIS:** Can I just get you to repeat that last part about the estimated actuals. Sorry, I was focusing on the—

**Mr LESTER:** Yes. Do you want me to do the whole question again or what?

**Ms DAVIS:** Just the part about the estimated actuals and the part about the user charges.

**Mr LESTER:** It is noted that only \$1 million has been estimated for 2001-02. Firstly, what caused the sharp escalation in user charges in the last financial year? Secondly, why is the estimate for the financial year nearly halved on last year's estimated actual?

<sup>034</sup> **Mr WELLS:** The answer is that it is an accounting phenomenon. However, we will take the question on notice and give you a fuller answer.

**Mr LESTER:** I note on page 1-8 of last year's MPS the proposed future development to finalise the State Coastal Management Plan and regional coastal management plan. I note on page 8 of this year's MPS the future development commitment to finalise the State Coastal Management Plan and five regional coastal management plans. Why has the commitment to finalise the State Coastal Management Plan not been met at this point?

**Mr WELLS:** One of the reasons was that we extended the period of consultation as a result of the election period, to 30 May I think. As a consequence of the large number of comments that came in as a result of the consultations we had, the deliberation time, which is now effluxing, will take a little longer than was originally anticipated. I will ask Olwyn Crimp if she would come and speak to us.

**Ms CRIMP:** The State Coastal Management Plan is nearing finalisation but, as the minister has said, there was a delay to allow for further consultation. The further consultation has also involved appropriately consulting with indigenous communities, and this has taken some time across the state because of the range of indigenous communities that we have.

As for the delays in the regional coastal plans, as the state coastal plan will set the general planning principles and guidelines for the state as a whole, the regional coastal plans are awaiting the release of the state coastal plan before they are released. The drafts for those plans are under preparation and they are awaiting the release of the state coastal plan. Once that is released the regional coastal plans will follow.

**Mr WELLS:** I apologise at this stage: I inadvertently misled the committee. I do not think I did extend the period of consultation on this.

**Ms CRIMP:** The period of consultation was not actually extended, but the period for the consideration of the submissions from that consultation and the finalisation of the plan has actually been extended from when we were first anticipating it would be completed.

**Mr WELLS:** There were 142 submissions. My apologies for that. I did not extend the time, but I did extend the time for consideration because of the large number of submissions.

**Mr LESTER:** I note explanatory note 3 of the output statement relating to environmental protection on page 10 of the MPS. The target of six coastal management plans was not achieved because the coastal management plans depend on the State Coastal Management Plan. Why, then, is there an estimated actual completion of three coastal management plans?

**Mr WELLS:** Because we want to consult carefully with the people on the coast, particularly the people who live on your coast and particularly people like you. We want to take on board fully what people think and we are serious about being consultative.

**Mr LESTER:** Why is it that on page 8 there is a commitment, mentioned earlier, to finalise the State Coastal Management Plan and five regional coastal management plans, yet on page 10 there is a target of only four additional coastal management plans?

**Mr WELLS:** These are future developments, not commitments for next year.

**Mr LESTER:** I note an estimated actual completion of three coastal management plans in 2000-01 and a target of four in 2001-02, which would result in seven coastal management plans in total. As according to my sums there are only a

possible six coastal management plans—one state plus five regional—why are you targeting to complete seven?

**Mr WELLS:** It is what is known in theology as a work of supererogation. We are going to try to do even more than is necessary for salvation. We are going to rescue the environment, and once we have done it we will do it over again.

**Mr LESTER:** That is a great oration. I am not always sure that it will work.

**Mr WELLS:** Do you want to take this matter further? Olwyn, why do we have the seventh coastal management plan?

**Ms CRIMP:** In total there are more than five coastal management plans that will have to be completed. At the moment we are in preparation for five, but there are actually areas of the coast which we have not yet started or we are in the process of doing some of the initial data collection for. They are areas such as the dry tropical coast, areas on Cape York and areas within the Whitsunday area. So there are still a range of coastal plans to be addressed. In total, the regional coastal plans should take up the entirety of the coast of Queensland, but there are only a certain number currently under preparation.

**Mr HOPPER:** Minister, I know you have heard me speak many times in parliament about the dingo problem we have in my electorate.

**Mr WELLS:** The first time you did it was in your maiden speech, actually.

**Mr HOPPER:** The majority of the farmers who have a big problem are around the base of the Bunya Mountains National Park and beside our forestries. Recently Wambo shire conducted a massive baiting program. We must always be allowed to bait in conjunction with our park rangers and our forest managers. When baiting takes place, the dingoes that do not get a bait take off into a refuge, which is usually national parks, whereas if we all bait at the same time we remove any refuge for the dogs who get missed. Could we implement a system whereby we always bait together?

**Mr WELLS:** That is obviously a good idea. There are baiting programs at the borders of our forests that are conducted not only by the local councils but also by my department. The objective of that is to keep the animals in the forest or the national park. I will invite Cathy Skippington to come forward and speak further to the committee about that.

**Ms SKIPPINGTON:** We would normally do a joint baiting, and the district manager for that area is working with local councils and DPI to ensure that that occurs. It would be standard practice for us to work with neighbours, the council and DPI to do joint baiting at similar times.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to page 1 of the MPS. Under 'Strategic Issues' it is noted that the Environmental Protection Agency is a lead agency for all environmental issues across the state, including the management of clean air. How much funding has been set aside in the 2001-02 budget to facilitate appropriate monitoring of air quality to ensure that Queenslanders are able to enjoy their right to clean air?

**Mr WELLS:** The amount of money that is spent on clean air would come from a number of different programs. I will cover some of those that I have spoken of already. If you were to take the lead out of all of the petrol, as we did in March, then you would have a significant impact on the air. And that does not cost very much, because that is just a regulatory program. That just costs the time and the effort of the officers that are involved in the regulation. The Regional Air Quality Monitoring Program, in respect of which I think we have approximately 27 stations around the

state, has a cost. I think it was around \$250,000 last year and something like \$500,000 this year. But that would be mentioning only a couple of the aspects of the program.

One of the other contributors to clean air is forests themselves. The regional forest agreement, which has led to the preservation of an enormous amount of forested area that might otherwise have been cleared, is the source of a tremendous amount of clean air simply because, as we know, forests take in carbon dioxide and put out oxygen.

The initiative which was taken jointly by the Minister for Primary Industries, the Minister for Natural Resources and I recently and which resulted in an amendment to the Forestry Act to establish carbon sinks and carbon credit trading, is also conducive to clean air. The idea of carbon trading is that somebody who is a polluter, somebody who is producing some substance which is going to infect the air with greenhouse gases, can, as it were, pay for that by purchasing carbon credits, and the carbon credits would be in the planting of forests. To set up a commercial system in that is a tremendous contribution to clean air. But how much does it cost government to do it? Well, not very much. It costs government basically the time of the officers who were involved and the cost of the exercise in parliament.

So a whole range of the things that government has done to achieve cleaner air, including the one that I started out with—the removal of lead from our air—cost apparently nothing. So it is not a matter of putting a budget on it, it is a matter of education and regulation. I might mention that lead is something which is known to cause diminished IQ, particularly in children, if it is ingested through petrol fumes. Consequently, the removal of the lead from the air, though it cost apparently nothing, has had an incredibly benign effect on future generations in this area.

**Mr LESTER:** I note from page 1 of the MPS that a south-east Queensland airshed model has been established. Will any airshed models be established in provincial or regional areas? Also, how many air quality monitoring stations have been established throughout the state and where are these stations located?

**Mr WELLS:** There are 27, as I said before.

**Mr LESTER:** And where are they located?

**Mr WELLS:** Throughout the state—south-east Queensland, Gladstone, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Cairns, Mount Isa and Mountain Creek on the Sunshine Coast. There are monitoring stations throughout Queensland in all of these significant sites.

We are working on one airshed in Gladstone, as well as the one we are working on in south-east Queensland. The advantage of that will be that we will have a computer program and the computer program will indicate very clearly the effect of certain inputs into the atmosphere. That will therefore give us guidance when we are advising somebody who is about to undertake a new activity. Just by knowing the effects of what you are going to do, an airshed model will, I think, contribute enormously to the air quality.

<sup>035</sup> **Mr LESTER:** Minister, why have you listed first in Recent Achievements of the Output Performance for Environmental Protection on page 7 of the MPS 'Release of draft South East Queensland Regional Nature Conservation Strategy' when, on page 1-7 last year, you listed first in Recent Achievements of the Output Performance for Environmental Protection 'Release of draft South East Queensland Regional Nature Conservation Strategy'—exactly the same claim in exactly the same wording?

**Mr WELLS:** This is because I have a deep and profound sentimental attachment to anything that happens in my own electorate. I do not get to launch very many things in my own electorate. What happened was the south-east Queensland regional conservation strategy I launched in my own electorate. I launched it with a snake and a bearded dragon. It was a very significant program.

I do not think that you can underestimate the importance of that program. See, it was part of the SEQ 2001 strategy that was formulated at the beginning of the 1990s. The whole idea of that regional plan was to ensure that you got the most benign development possible. You are dealing there with an area that was subject to extremely significant population growth by national standards, and it was important that the natural capital of that area should not be eroded by impulsive or reckless development that had little regard for the natural capital.

So what was done by the government in those early years of the nineties was to identify those areas that were rich in terms of environmental capital as well as those that were rich in terms of agricultural value or where there was mining value and simply advised the local councils—all of whom came on board as a result of the coordination and cooperation that was involved in this program—that those were areas where you should not put in residential development. There were certain nodes which were selected for transport. There were certain centres that were selected for special population development. There was a program of infill so that where there were structures in place those areas were filled, so that the people who were in the new residences had infrastructure around them. That was the whole idea of the whole plan.

Now, the south-east Queensland regional nature conservation program, under my predecessor in the last financial year, took significant steps forward. But just a few months ago I was able to launch the plan in Pine Rivers shire. The Mayor of Pine Rivers shire, a former minister in a government of which the member for Keppel was part, played a very constructive role as far as her shire is concerned, and I would like to take the opportunity to pay tribute to her and her council with respect to the fact that they were so quick off the mark to get the local conservation plan in place.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for questions by non-government members has expired.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, on page 7 of the MPS you mention that sustainable industries establish programs through partnerships to support the development of sustainable industries. Can you advise what partnership programs with industry have been entered into by the Sustainable Industries Division?

**Mr WELLS:** My department is actively seeking partnerships, and there are a whole range of strategies that can be used. For example, you can increase production and reduce the environmental impact at the same time. Strategies like biomimicry, for example, are using a natural phenomenon to do something that you could do with a chemical phenomenon but less effectively. For example, if you use dung beetles instead of some chemical solution to a problem, you get a better outcome. Another one is drip irrigation instead of flooding. That is the use of a minimalist approach—minimalist solutions. And the use of higher technology, such as solar or wind or other means of alternative technology instead of the more cost effective and more polluting, can often in the longer run yield significant results.

I will invite Dr John Cole to come and speak to the committee. There are an enormous number of partnerships that he has entered into with, in some cases, amazing results.

**Dr COLE:** As the minister said, our industry partnerships program is one of the most popular elements of the EPA's activities. Indeed, we have partnerships now with 28 industry associations representing the major part of Queensland industry, as diverse as the Urban Development Institute of Australia and the Queensland Farmers Federation. In fact, much of the most popular take-up of the ecoefficiency programs that we run are, indeed, with Queensland farmers, because they understand very much the benefits of resource productivity and the use of environmental performance to position in competitive markets.

Greenhouse gas abatement is one of the primary outputs of one part of our programs. We have within the partnerships area a greenhouse industry partnerships program and a Cleaner Production Partnerships Program. Collectively, we look to allocate something like \$1.6 million to underwrite these partnerships. It should be emphasised that this money leverages development from other government agencies, particularly from the Commonwealth, where our leveraging rate tends to be in the order of about 10 to one, and also with Queensland industry. The kind of targets we have set for this program just with our partners is something like 250,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas abated each year. We are providing grants of up to \$50,000 per business, particularly for demonstration projects that will involve significant parts of the industry. Our principal partnership in this area is with Queensland commerce.

**Mr WELLS:** The outcomes which this division has achieved are really incredible. I will ask Dr John Cole to continue.

**Dr COLE:** Perhaps the best example I can give of a potential impact through sustainable industries is the Queensland Dairy Organisation. There we have a partnership where we worked with seven farms to demonstrate that, on ordinary dairy farms, we can identify savings of up to \$15,000 a year for the average Queensland dairy farmer. Extrapolated across the industry, that meant that we could identify in that industry an annual saving of \$18 million a year for a one-off investment of \$21 million. This is the kind of figure that we see quite commonly in Queensland industry. It simply means that there is great opportunity in areas as diverse as prawn farming or horticulture. If I look at the urban areas—the Nursery Industry Association, the Australian Industry Group—wherever you look there is great opportunity to turn waste into dollar savings and, of course, money that can be reinvested in business. The dairy farm example is a good one. We showed there that the average dairy farm could save something like 2,500 litres of fuel a year, four megalitres of water per year, and at the moment we are working with the QDO to roll out that learning—because it is exactly that; it is learning—with the dairy farmers.

The tourism industry is another good example of where we are working with small private operators like caravan park operators to make very commonsense adjustments that will save them money and make for good environmental outcomes. The 250,000 tonnes of greenhouse gas abated we know can be extrapolated to be, across industry, a result many times that amount.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, again on page 7 of the MPS you mention that environmental operations protect the environment. How many successful prosecutions have been initiated by the EPA, and what has been the level of penalties?

**Mr WELLS:** The prosecutions that have been initiated—I think that there are about 22 by the EPA and about 25—I will call an officer from the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority to correct my memory if it is incorrect. I do know that the penalties go from \$50 to \$400,000. We in this department are extremely serious about prosecuting those who have committed offences.

There was recently a prosecution of two executives of Universal Abrasives, and those prosecutions led to a jail sentence. While nobody rejoices that anybody has to suffer a jail sentence, at the same time it sends a signal. I think that this society is extremely serious about preserving its quality of life, and that intractable refusal to abide by environmental standards set by the society is not going to be tolerated. I will ask Alan Feely to come forward and speak further in respect of these matters.

**Mr FEELY:** As the minister was discussing, we recently successfully prosecuted Universal Abrasives and its directors, Leslie Moore and Donald Hobson. The penalties imposed included an 18-month jail term for Mr Moore and \$425,000 in fines for the directors and the company. These penalties are the highest ever imposed for environmental offences in Queensland and probably Australia—that we are aware of. The decision demonstrates the EPA's commitment to environmental protection and sends a very strong message to people contemplating similar actions.

The history was that between July 1996 and September 1998 Universal Abrasives and its two directors operated from a site at Bulimba. They carried out the activities of transporting, storing and recycling abrasive blasting waste to produce a saleable product. This waste consisted of a number of things, but particularly a biocide called tributyl tin—TBT.

In September 1998, our staff observed that water heavily contaminated with these metals was entering a stormwater drain into the Brisbane River. The company vacated the Bulimba site shortly after that inspection and Mr Moore moved the blasting waste to a residential site in Beveridge Road in Thornlands.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Were there any prosecutions arising out of the recent sewerage spillage at Bullock Head Creek?

**Mr WELLS:** No, the situation there was different from the situation with respect to Universal Abrasives, and it was different again from the situation in AMH. With respect to AMH it was necessary to issue an environmental protection order, and in respect of Universal Abrasives it was necessary to conduct a prosecution.

The criteria according to which the discretion to prosecute is exercised includes, first of all, the public interest—is the public interest going to be served by conducting a prosecution? One of the factors with respect to that is: is the person who has committed the offence prepared to take the consequences of doing whatever cleaning up can be done, of amending their behaviour, accepting prompt responsibility and that kind of thing?

However, I am not the person who exercises the discretion to prosecute. The person who exercises the discretion to prosecute in these kinds of cases is Alan Feely. I will ask him if he would speak to this, particularly with respect to the distinction between the AMH case, the Brisbane City Council case and the Universal Abrasives case.

<sup>036</sup> **Mr FEELY:** I gave a brief background on the Universal Abrasives case. In the Brisbane City Council case, there was a sewerage spill that occurred in January 2001 from a sewerage pumping station—between one and two megalitres of untreated sewerage into Bullock Head Creek. Overflows from sewerage pump

stations are relatively infrequent but they are caused by things such as power failure, blockages, burst mains or storm events. Sewerage pump stations are designed to cater for the majority of flows but they are also designed to allow for discharge of excess in controlled circumstances. They have to be.

A decision on whether or not we would take enforcement action in such a case is purely on a case-by-case basis. It takes into consideration whether or not enforcement action or prosecution is in the public good or in the public interest and that it will lead to an environmental outcome more favourable than the current outcome or from other options, or if, as a result of the prosecution, the outcome will change or prevent a re-occurrence of the negligence, and also whether or not the organisation is a repeat offender, or if the organisation has blatantly ignored EPA directives in addressing the problems, or whether or not they have taken responsibility for their actions and implemented appropriate measures.

There are glaring differences between BCC, which did everything correctly in response to that, versus some of the cases we discussed prior to that. We have a number of commitments from the Brisbane City Council that will resolve the issue, but they are also clearly on notice that if they do not—

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Pumicestone has moved for an extension of time. Minister, do you agree?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, please.

**Mr FEELY:** Brisbane City Council are clearly on notice that if they do not undertake the works that we have agreed, then they will be subject to some enforcement action, most likely an environmental protection order to force them to do so.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On pages 2-13 and 2-14 of the MPS you mention the finalisation of the master plan for the Queensland parks system. What progress has been made in finalising this master plan?

**Mr WELLS:** The master plan is necessary so that we can have consistent management processes across the national parks of Queensland. We need this in order to ensure that we have ecologically sustainable development of these parks. That is the issue that honourable members of the committee were talking about a little while ago when we were discussing the matter of usage of the parks. That is why we need the master plan. I will ask the executive director of Parks and Wildlife if he would speak further to this.

**Dr McPHAIL:** The master plan is very much a document that is intended to provide a very clear direction for the management of the protected areas in Queensland. It will combine our obligations in relation to statutory matters and also community and industry expectations. Lots of organisations prepare strategic plans, or operational plans, or documents of that sort. In this case, we are trying to do something that will be a genuine guide for the parks service in the investment that it makes in the parks and in the resources that it applies to the various aspects of managing the park. Flowing from the master plan will be a series of action plans with targets and dates for completion that will direct the parks service subject, of course, to political decision into the next decade.

The master plan was released for discussion in November of last year. It has gone through an extensive public consultation period. We have held advisory forum meetings around the state. We have had vigorous discussions in those advisory forum meetings. We have recognised just how important the parks system is to so many people in this community, both regional and urban, and we have made sure

that key representative groups have been involved in providing advice and feedback.

Given all of this, we are now looking to complete the master plan by the end of this calendar year. After that completion and adoption by government, of course, we would then commence its implementation. We think that it is going to be that master document that provides us with direction into the future.

**Mr WELLS:** May I have the indulgence of the committee to now answer the question which I took on notice from the honourable member for Keppel?

**The CHAIRMAN:** Leave granted.

**Mr WELLS:** I understood that the honourable member for Keppel was referring to page 12 of the MPS—the page that he identified was page 12—and that was relating to environmental protection user charges. The context in which the question was asked confused me and others, because the context seemed as if he was referring to national parks user charges.

If he was referring to national parks user charges, which would have been page 17 of the MPS, then the answer would be different. So let me give the answer as though the honourable member were referring to page 12 of the MPS, environmental protection. There are a number of technical consultancies secured beyond the initial budgeted works. The increase in user charges was 19 per cent. Based on the current forward projections, user charges will reduce in the financial year 2002. User charges does not include statutory fees such as licence fees. They are fees for services such as complex numerical modelling, that is, the kind of stuff that our scientists have to seek further advice on.

If on the other hand the reference was wrong and the user charges that the honourable member was asking about were the user charges in respect of parks, forests and wildlife, then I would refer him to page 17 and footnote 1 to that indicating the full year effective machinery of government changes. That would answer the question.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, minister. I call on the member for Kawana.

**Mr CUMMINS:** Minister, on page 9 of the MPS at the top dot point you mention the preparation of a biodiversity strategy for Queensland. The biodiversity strategy and relevant issues have been touched upon here tonight, but please advise the committee further as to the status of the Queensland biodiversity strategy.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. Did I mention that we have 13 terrestrial and 14 marine bioregions according to our biologists?

**Mr CUMMINS:** Not to my memory, no.

**Mr WELLS:** Let it be recorded that that is what the biologists say. That makes us easily the state's most biologically diverse state. If we do not understand the biological diversity of our state, then we do not understand fully the reasons why we need to have representative samples of each of these ecosystems in our national park system, we do not understand why the selections that are made are sometimes made. We need to have representative populations of each of these different biologically diverse ecosystems in our national parks system and we, therefore, need to have our strategy informed by this information. I will ask Dr Brian Head to come forward and speak further to this matter.

<sup>037</sup> **Dr HEAD:** The minister has explained why the need for such a strategy exists in Queensland, given the richness of our biological diversity. Some years ago, the Australian government, in conjunction with the states, negotiated a national strategy

for the conservation of Australia's biological diversity to comply with its international treaty obligations. In the five years since that national strategy was released, most other states have chosen to develop a state strategy that takes up many of those national issues.

The minister has recently given an instruction for Queensland to prepare a draft Queensland strategy for biodiversity conservation. As the minister has said, this state is the most naturally diverse state in Australia with very important ecosystems and very important diversity of various kinds of living species. This contributes to Queensland's economic wealth and to the quality of life enjoyed by Queenslanders.

The strategy would focus attention on the importance of conserving Queensland's biodiversity within the wider themes of ecologically sustainable development and natural resource management. Naturally, the strategy would be developed in conjunction with other agencies and other levels of government, particularly those concerned with land-use management, and would draw on existing strategies and plans in this area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Dr Head. There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Environment. I thank the minister and his departmental staff for their attendance here today. I know that they went to a lot of trouble, as did all the other departments that we have examined today, putting all of this together.

I also thank Hansard—Mr Doug Rohl and staff—for the work that they do during these proceedings. I thank the parliamentary attendants for their assistance. On behalf of the committee, I thank our research director, Ms Veronica Rogers and her assistant, Ms Andrea Musch, for their support throughout this process. I also thank the opposition members for the assistance they have given our committee during this time. I include the Independent member.

Following the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by parliament on 30 May 2001, I declare the public hearing closed. Minister, do you want to comment before we close officially?

**Mr WELLS:** I second the thanks that you have offered to all the officers. I particularly thank my colleagues for their interest in the matters of my portfolio.

The committee adjourned at 7.26 p.m.