

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G**

Mrs J. M. Attwood (Chair)

Mr S. W. Copeland

Mr H. W. T. Hobbs

Ms C. T. Male

Ms R. G. Nolan

Mr M. H. Rowell

Ms B. G. Stone

**PRIMARY INDUSTRIES AND RURAL COMMUNITIES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. H. Palaszczuk, Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities

Dr W. Hoey, Director-General

Mr T. Johnston, Deputy Director-General

Mr B. McDonald, A/Executive Director, Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences

Dr P. Grieve, Director, Fisheries and Aquaculture, Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences

Mr J. Pollock, Policy and Industry Development

Mr J. Skinner, Executive Director, Corporate Performance

Ms P. Pender, General Manager, Finance and Business Development

Ms J. Stone, General Manager, Office of Rural Communities

Mr P. White, Executive Director, Rural Industries Business Services

Mr C. Holden, Chief Executive Officer, Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority

Mr P. Neville, Deputy Director-General, Queensland Fisheries Service

<sup>001</sup> The committee commenced at 8.28 a.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee G now open. I welcome the minister, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance here today and introduce the committee members to you. First of all there is the deputy chair, Marc Rowell, the member for Hinchinbrook; Mr Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham; Carolyn Male, the member for Glass House; Barbara Stone, the member for Springwood; Rachel Nolan, the member for Ipswich; and myself as chair, Julie Attwood, the member for Mount Ommaney. I also apologise for Dorothy Pratt. She is unable to attend the hearing here today due to illness. Under sessional order 15 the member for Warrego, Mr Howard Hobbs, has been nominated as her substitute member.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in Appropriation Bill 2001 for the area set out in the sessional orders of 30 May 2001. The committee will examine the organisational units in the following order: the Department of Primary Industries and Rural Communities, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, Disability Services Queensland and then the Department of Families.

The committee has agreed that it will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea will be from 10 a.m. to 10.15 a.m. There will be a further break from 11.45 a.m. to 12 noon. After that break the committee will examine proposed expenditure for the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and

Minister for Families and Minister for Disability Services. The committee will break for lunch from 1 p.m. to 2 p.m. There will be a further 15-minute break from 3.45 p.m. to 4 p.m.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in these proceedings. In that regard I remind members of the public that in accordance with standing order 195 strangers, that is the public, may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. The committee has resolved that TV file footage without sound be allowed for the opening statements by the chair and ministers and that radio and print media coverage be allowed at other times. I ask that any mobile phones or pagers be switched off or into silent mode.

The first item for consideration is the estimates for the expenditure for the Department of Primary Industries and Rural Communities. I remind members of the committee and ministers that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allotted to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. In accordance with the sessional orders, a member who is not a committee member may, with the committee's leave, ask the ministers questions. In this regard the committee has agreed that it will automatically grant leave to any non-government committee member who wishes to question the minister unless an objection is raised at the time by a member of the committee.

I ask that departmental witnesses identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that Hansard can record the information. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Department of Primary Industries and Rural Communities to be open for examination. The time allotted is three hours. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish to make an opening statement, the committee asks that you limit it to five minutes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Thank you very much. Under the 2001-02 state budget, the Department of Primary Industries operating budget has increased by \$9.7 million to \$299.6 million. The budget builds on the government's priorities and ensures that the DPI delivers on its key strategies of supporting innovative food and fibre industries and confident communities. The department has projected this financial year to be a record 12 months for Queensland's primary industries in terms of gross value of production. I hope I have the opportunity to go into some detail about the Department of Primary Industries projection during the course of the estimates projection.

The department's budget is a strong investment to support our food and fibre industries to realise such a projection. A major challenge that the department has had to deal with this year has been the arrival of the fire ant—a very serious exotic pest—native to South America. I brought three specimens of this pest—they are dead, of course—with me for the benefit of the committee members. They are here

in this jar. Most people out there in the community believe that the fire ant is some sort of a giant ant, but in actual fact it is quite minute. I will pass the sample around shortly for committee members to have a look at.

What has happened with the fire ant is this: it has breached the national quarantine barriers maintained by the federal government. The Queensland government, through the Department of Primary Industries, has made an immediate and professional response to this pest which has been detected at more than 700 sites in Brisbane. In negotiation with the Commonwealth and other states and territories and with input from overseas experts, the department has developed a \$123 million, five-year eradication plan. I can announce today for the benefit of the committee that approximately 400 new jobs will be created as part of the proposed eradication campaign. These people will be enlisted to undertake pest treatment, monitoring and other vital support roles to repel this invader. If successful—and I as minister certainly believe we can be successful—it will be the first time that the fire ant has been eradicated anywhere in the world. If we are successful, then those 400 or so people—the many staff who are already in the field and those supporters across communities—will be regarded as heroes. They will be the people who saved the great Australian lifestyle from this insidious and uncompromising pest.

The fire ant also poses enormous economic costs to Australia, with estimates that it could be responsible for more than \$6 billion over the next 30 years. I have sought an urgent meeting of Australian agricultural ministers to discuss the proposed eradication plan. For the benefit of the committee, I point out that the ministers are expected to take part in a telephone hook-up late tomorrow afternoon. Madam Chairman, officers of the department and I welcome any questions from the committee.

**Mr ROWELL:** Minister, you might recall giving me an assurance last year in these hearings that your government's \$53 million equity withdrawal from the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority would not affect its operations and performance in any way. Can you explain why then that QRAA's total liabilities have ballooned from \$63.3 million just over two years ago to a projected \$117.7 million this year?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Is that it?

**Mr ROWELL:** I might also note that on page 2-6 of the budget statements, note 1 has no explanation at all. I think it is quite unusual to have a notation and then not put any comments or footnotes with it.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, let's just go through what QRAA does. It is the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority and it manages a loan portfolio of \$120 million. That means that QRAA has loans to rural Queenslanders at concessional rates to the value of approximately \$120 million. These loans assist our rural Queenslanders recover from natural disasters such as cyclones and flooding or for on-farm water infrastructure or general farm build-up and productivity improvements.

Last financial year at least \$35 million worth of concessional loans were approved by QRAA. If I can have a look at the QRAA annual report of 1998, I can see that the amount of concessional loans was \$18.6 million and in 1996-97 it was \$12.4 million. If you add those two together you will get around \$30 million. So in two years under your government you loaned around \$30 million. In one year under our government we have loaned \$35 million in concessional loans. I think that

stands very favourably with the charter of QRAA. At this stage I might ask Colin Holden, who is the executive director of QRAA, to add to my comments.

**Mr HOLDEN:** In terms of the increase in liabilities in the 2001-02 estimate, that has fundamentally come as a result of QRAA moving in line with whole-of-government cash management practices last year in terms of just in time funding. Incorporated in that is the need for funds to come through the department to the authority for its on-lending to its producer clients. It is those funds coming through from Treasury that have resulted in the increase in liabilities. It is similar to when the authority was initially established. When funds were provided as a capital injection for lending to the primary industries, a liability was established at that point. I give you my apologies for the fact that there is no notation in relation to that note.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Are you quite satisfied with that, Marc?

**Mr ROWELL:** No. I just want to ask another question. It is quite evident that we are seeing a very flat situation in relation to borrowings. There is only a variation of about \$1 million from \$35 million to \$34 million in the estimated actuals to the estimate of \$33 million next year, yet we are seeing an escalation in the interest bearing liabilities going from \$78.448 million to \$115.374 million. Can you explain why that has occurred, considering that it is very flat as far as the lending is concerned? You are not lending any more money, yet the debt is going up.

**Mr HOLDEN:** Again, there are proposals there for a further \$33 million in lending for the 2001-02 financial year as well as the estimates for the \$34 million for the 2000-01 year. So you are talking about an additional \$68 million in lending through that two-year period.

**Mr ROWELL:** They must not be paying anything back.

**Mr HOLDEN:** Obviously there would be an increase in liabilities over that period as the funds come through from Treasury.

**Mr ROWELL:** It just appears that nothing is getting paid back.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think that is uncalled for. Could you repeat that statement again?

**Mr ROWELL:** What I am saying is that if you are estimating that there is going to be an escalation as far as the borrowings are concerned, it would be considered that during that period there would be some repayments going on. So it is quite evident that, while you are talking about an accumulation of the debt because of the additional borrowings there does not seem to be any receivables coming back.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Colin, that is quite natural, isn't it?

**Mr HOLDEN:** Yes. If you look at page 2-6 you will see that there is an increase from \$78 million to \$115 million. So you are talking about an approximately \$37 million increase in liabilities as opposed to the proposed \$67 million in actual lending. So that suggests that in that period there has been repayment of debt to the Commonwealth and other entities because you only have a net increase of some \$37 million as opposed to an outlay of some \$67 million.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We are very fortunate to have QRAA to be able to give concessional loans to our producers whether it is in times of natural disaster or whether it is in times to support their on-farm operations. I believe that QRAA does a magnificent job. What your government was lending in two years our government is matching and lending in one year. I believe what we are doing with QRAA is very well appreciated by our rural constituency. At the end of the day you will find that

that is the case. All you have to do is talk to some of the people who have taken out QRAA loans.

**Mr ROWELL:** Can you explain why the 2000-01 actual borrowings came in at \$31.2 million—I am talking about the cash flow on page 2-7—almost double the \$16.2 million budgeted amount and why borrowings costs increased by more than 2,300 per cent from \$27,000 to \$660,000?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Colin, would you like to have a look at that?

**Mr ROWELL:** I asked the minister because I have to direct that question to the minister, and the minister responds accordingly.

<sup>002</sup> **Mr HOLDEN:** In terms of the first query in relation to the increase from \$16 million to \$31 million, that in fact is an increase in the borrowings in terms of the funding we have received through both the Department of Primary Industries from Treasury and also the Commonwealth in terms of natural disaster. So you are talking about an increase over that period in terms of liabilities for funding received from lending.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the end of the day, as I said previously, QRAA continues to perform well. New programs have been introduced in the previous year and existing programs have been or are being amended to meet changing industry needs. QRAA's outlays in 2000-01 were broadly in line with expenditure in previous years. Expenditure under each grant or loans scheme changes over time, reflecting the stage of each program and circumstances facing producers. There were three new programs introduced in 2000-01, and no doubt at some later stage the member for Hinchinbrook will refer to one of them, that is, the East Coast Trawl Fisheries Structural Adjustment Scheme, as well as the East Coast Trawl Fisheries Restructure Assistance Scheme and the Sugar Industry Replanting and Establishment Scheme.

The East Coast Trawl Fisheries Structural Adjustment Scheme expenditure in 2000-01 was \$20 million. Uptake of the sugar replanting scheme has been low due to the subsequent introduction of the federal government's sugar scheme, which was only available on the condition that producers were not accessing the state government scheme. At the end of the day, the federal government said that if producers took up its scheme they could not take up the state government scheme. Uptake of the East Coast Trawl Fisheries Restructure Assistance Scheme has been low, as this scheme has only been recently introduced. It appears that there has been a reluctance to date by fishers who are selling to break up effort units into amounts suitable to buyers under this scheme.

Queensland's contribution to the new FarmBis program will be \$5 million per year over the next three years, which has been obtained from interest revenue from the Primary Industry Productivity Enhancement—PIPE—scheme. Natural disaster relief assistance payments were \$14.1 million in 2000-01, \$3.9 million higher than 1999-2000. I think we all understand what that was about with the unseasonable weather in far-north Queensland. At the end of the day, the uptake in the scheme for our canegrowers has been very low simply because the federal government basically stated that if producers took up the federal government scheme they could not access the state government scheme. There is another reason why the East Coast Trawl Fisheries Restructure Assistance Scheme is low, and that of course is that the federal government has not accredited the plan. Unfortunately, the federal government has not accredited the east coast trawl management plan. There is no certainty at all within the industry.

**Mr ROWELL:** I go back to the question I asked in relation to the borrowing cost going from \$27,000 to \$660,000 and then blowing out to \$821,000 this next year. I would understand if it was the likes of stamp duty, establishment fees and that type of thing, but it is quite a substantial escalation. Once again, there is another note 1 here, too, yet there is no explanation on the bottom of page 2-7.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I would ask you to please identify the page at the beginning of your question. I again ask Colin Holden to answer.

**Mr HOLDEN:** In terms of the increased borrowing costs, I would ask to take that question on notice to look into that further and come back to you.

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, because it is quite substantial. It goes from \$27,000 up to \$821,000 next year.

**Mr HOLDEN:** What you say is right, that is, the authority does cover the costs of stamp duty and all those types of issues for producers who make applications. So I would suggest that that is a fair proportion of that.

**Mr ROWELL:** It is, but there is a substantial escalation. That is the point I am making.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I want to comment on that a bit further. I refer to the PIPE loans scheme that is part of our QRAA initiative. I would like to explain to the committee, and I am quite sure that the committee would like to hear, why the PIPES loans were less than outlays under this program in 1999-2000. Unfortunately, this appears to be a result of the buoyancy of the cattle industry and the difficult circumstances facing the sugar and dairy industries. Demand for PIPES loans can be expected to increase, as we are in the process of amending this scheme to allow loans for supply chain and value-adding projects beyond the farm gate. That is a very important point.

In order to ensure that QRAA's operating costs are met in administering the PIPE scheme, QRAA decided that the concessional interest rate be revised annually, linking it to government funds. New PIPES loans are subject to an interest rate that is set each July and based on the Queensland Treasury Corporation borrowing rate plus one per cent. This is consistent with sound financial management practices. Demand for drought crop loans and drought restocking loans has been low due to the good run of seasons over most of Queensland, although I must admit that currently on the western Darling Downs we certainly are going through some quite difficult problems.

On that point, I call on the federal agriculture minister, Warren Truss, to make a final determination on the exceptional circumstances application that was put before his government last November. This application was put together by Agforce and by the Department of Primary Industries. I believe it was one of the most well-researched submissions ever put forward before the federal government and still there is absolutely no answer, only attacks by the federal agriculture minister, Warren Truss, demanding that the state governments contribute 50 per cent of funding from the exceptional circumstances scheme. I do not believe that is right. In the early 1990s a scheme was introduced by the then federal Labor government under the stewardship of a person who was not considered a friend of our rural constituency, that is, Paul Keating. It is about time Warren Truss and the federal government lifted their act and acceded to the requests of our graingrowers on the Western Downs.

**Mr ROWELL:** I presume that if there is an aspect of the state government's contribution to supporting exceptional circumstances, you will be doing that then?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The current formula for exceptional circumstances basically is that the federal government provides 90 per cent and the state government provides 10 per cent. Under that arrangement, the state government's commitment is there. But let us take into account also that we are the only state in Australia currently that provides transaction based subsidies to our producers who are either on drought-declared properties or in drought-declared shires. I understand that in the last year our state government expended close to \$900,000 in that area, especially for those 19 droughted shires and 300-odd individually droughted properties. That is in stark contrast to what the federal government under Warren Truss has done. It has done absolutely nothing. It has paid lip-service. All it has done is requested over and over again for more information to be provided by industry and by the Department of Primary Industries to stall for time.

I think that what the federal government is doing is a cruel political exercise. If it is going to approve exceptional circumstances, it is going to wait until it is pretty close to the federal election so it can come out smelling of roses. But, unfortunately, it will not come out smelling of roses. Rather, it will come out smelling of something a lot different to roses. The rural constituency, particularly in Queensland, will certainly let the federal government know how it feels about what it is doing in relation to exceptional circumstances. You just cannot leave people with problems dangling month after month after month waiting for a determination.

**Mr ROWELL:** I will remind you of that comment, Minister.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** If you are going to make a decision, you either make a decision as to yes or no. People want to know. People want certainty.

**Mr ROWELL:** Good. I am pleased you have said it. I turn now to 'Output Linkages with Government Priorities' at pages 1-4 and 1-5 and the intention of the government to provide more jobs for Queenslanders in each of the five department outputs. According to staffing figures on page 1-7, two of the outputs will be estimated to decrease in 2001-02 on top of the 118 staff numbers shed since your last budget's projections, taking the total number of staff sacked or displaced from DPI over the last three years to 534. Why haven't your actions backed up the jobs rhetoric repeatedly referred to as a whole-of-government priority?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You used quite an emotive term in your question, that is, that staff were 'sacked'. Let me say over and over again that there have been no staff sacked from the Department of Primary Industries. No staff have been sacked from the Department of Primary Industries. This morning I announced a scheme that will employ an additional 400 staff at least for the control of fire ants. I can well remember a similar situation that occurred with the papaya fruit fly. There would have been close to 300 to 400 people employed to eradicate the papaya fruit fly. When that scheme ended, what happened to those people? When the scheme ends, the people go because they are not required anymore. That can account for a number of those people. Then there was a transfer of certain people from the corporate services sector, and I can keep going. To get the exact details of that for you, I ask the director-general, Dr Warren Hoey, to give you a comprehensive response.

**Dr HOEY:** The honourable member has a keen interest in this, as do we all. I need to put in front of you the updated figures which you would not have, because at the time of putting together the MPS they were estimates. So the figures I have now are actuals, and I will take you through the mathematics of that. If you ask any questions of substantial detail, I will take them on notice. As at 30 June 2000, there were 3,730 full-time equivalents, and that is recorded in the MPS. As at 30 June

2001, it is 3,263, the difference being 467. As the minister has said, the transfer of the corporate services agency to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines accounted for 278 of this decrease. At the same time as the move of the corporate services agency, 46 FTE transferred into DPI from the old Queensland Fisheries Management Authority. So the net decrease, excluding the CSA and QFMA shifts and leaving out the commercial forestry group, is 208. Of that figure, 139 were permanent.

If you look at the DPI, the organisation has an annual turnover of between about seven per cent to nine per cent of staff. So that is well within normal fluctuations. Since March, we have had a net gain of approximately 20 staff. As of this moment, we have 120 vacancies in the pipeline that are in various stages of advertisement and being filled, and they are not recorded there. I am also advised that in the last year we have had an unusually high level of secondments and leave without pay, totalling nearly 70 people. As best as I can gather, that is about twice our normal rate. So they are not accounted for in those figures. As the minister has also indicated, that does not include any accounting for people we might employ in the fire ant program, because the precise details of that are unknown at this stage.

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

**Ms MALE:** I note the ease with which some people can talk down our food and fibre industries and criticise the Department of Primary Industries. Minister, from your opening statement you indicated that DPI believes the next 12 months could be a record for primary industries. Further, I refer you to page 1-30 and to dot point 1 dash 8 of the 2001-02 Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Could you please advise the committee of the future outlook of the primary industries sector in Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Can I say that the honourable member was quite perceptive in listening attentively to my opening remarks, because she picked up the fact that I did want to refer further to the future of the primary industries sector in Queensland. Our primary industries sector really is a driving force in the social and economic development of our state. It accounts for a third of Queensland total goods exports and employs more than 100,000 people on farm and 60,000 people in food and fibre manufacturing and processing. This basically represents around 10 per cent of the state's total work force.

For the very first time in Queensland, the gross value of the state's primary industries is forecast to exceed \$7 billion in 2000-01, and this is predicted to rise to \$7.89 billion in 2001-02. The largest contributor, of course, will be cattle and the calf industry, which are forecast to contribute 39 per cent of the total in the year 2000-01 and 36 per cent in the year 2001-02. The gross value of Queensland's livestock disposals is forecast to increase by 17 per cent between 1999-2000 and 2000-01, with all major livestock industries showing positive changes.

The gross value of sugarcane is expected to increase by 66 per cent to \$1.05 billion in 2001-02. Queensland's fruit and vegetable production is expected to grow by three per cent to \$1.15 billion over the same period, with increases in mandarins, mangoes, pineapples, avocados and tomatoes. Total fisheries production is forecast to increase by three per cent to \$389 million in 2001-02, with wild caught fisheries to increase by one per cent and aquaculture, which is a real growth industry, to increase by 14 per cent. Pigs and poultry production are both forecast to grow at the rate of 11 per cent to \$210 million and seven per cent to \$182 million respectively.



Our organic industry is another growth industry. Organic food is the fastest growing niche market, growing at approximately 20 per cent per year. The development of a competitive and sustainable organic industry in Queensland that can capture the significant market opportunities is a high priority for the Queensland government.

The future outlook for Queensland's primary food and fibre industries over the next financial year is certainly positive. These successful industries will continue to provide employment for people in Queensland. For the benefit of the committee, I have with me copies of *Prospects for Queensland's primary industries*. It is a great publication put together by the Department of Primary Industries. I will certainly have these circulated for the benefit of all committee members.

**Ms STONE:** I was very interested in your earlier comments in relation to the DPI's current and proposed response strategy to the red imported fire ant. I am also interested in actually looking at the samples you have brought along. I congratulate the DPI on its efforts in responding to the outbreak which followed a breach of the national quarantine barriers, maintained by the federal government. I note that this is dealt with at point 2 on page 1-14 of the 2001-02 Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Minister, could you please explain and expand upon the emergency response program that has been developed by your department in relation to the red imported fire ant?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Certainly. Following the detection of fire ant in Brisbane in late February 2001, our department immediately established an emergency response to this serious pest. Overseas experience shows us that fire ants will impact on the environment, on industry, on the community and also on agriculture. The emergency response involved the secondment of experienced staff to a dedicated task force that concentrated initially on determining the seriousness and the extent of the outbreak. The response team also initiated movement controls on specific high-risk materials to prevent the further spread of the pest. Increased public awareness and the follow-up of reports from the public who suspect fire ants assisted greatly in delimiting the extent of the outbreak. In that regard we really need to pay tribute to the DPI call centre for the great work that it has done up until now and the great work that I believe it will continue to do.

The DPI is the lead agency for the response, but other departments have either provided staff to assist in the response or organised support packages for businesses affected by fire ant. Ric Natrass from Parks and Wildlife has been loaned to us by the EPA. He is stationed at our fire ant centre and doing a marvellous job there as well.

The Standing Committee on Agriculture and Resource Management, SCARM, endorsed national cost sharing of \$750,000 for the scoping phase of the response, which followed the emergency response, and extended it to 30 June 2001. Queensland's contribution to that cost-sharing arrangement is around \$81,000. During the emergency response, in the scoping stage, the Queensland government has incurred costs amounting to an additional \$750,000 over and above the Queensland contribution to this national cost-shared budget.

The DPI fire ant control centre, located at Wacol in my electorate, has about 60 staff and was established as the operations base for the fire ant response. Surveillance to further determine the exact location of the ants has been carried out, and the infestations appear to be confined to the south-western suburbs of Brisbane, centred around Wacol, and to Fisherman Islands. Limited treatments to control some of the nests and to determine the most effective method of eradicating

the pest have also been carried out. Progress is encouraging and scientists advise that, provided fire ant remains confined to those two current locations, eradication is feasible. The response has provided employment opportunity, with an additional 32 temporary and full-time casual staff now working from the Wacol centre.

**Ms NOLAN:** I am aware that the Queensland government has committed to biosecurity and protecting the clean and safe image of Queensland's primary industries. I refer you to point 7 on page 1-13 of the MPS. Considering the continual threat of pests and diseases from northern neighbours, what is Northwatch delivering to reduce the risks to Queensland industry and community?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Northwatch is directed at remote areas of north Queensland and the Torres Strait Islands. It provides an enhancement to Queensland's overall capability for early detection and response to exotic plant and animal pests and diseases. One million dollars will be allocated to Northwatch in the year 2001-02 to continue the project. Northwatch has a permanent staff of scientists who interact with other agencies, such as AQIS and other state departments.

This interaction is provided through the joint operational planning group, JOG. The project has undertaken significant surveys of urban community plant and animal populations and plant pest host populations in Cape York. These activities will assist with ongoing assessment of risks and help pinpoint cost-efficient surveillance systems for the future.

Northwatch maintains an inspection and information centre at Coen, which I was fortunate enough to open last year. I believe it is strategically placed in relation to movements of tourists through the area and in relation to mounting response activities in remote community settlements on the Cape York Peninsula.

Northwatch project staff routinely deliver parts of the national surveillance and response strategy against incursions of exotic fruit flies in Torres Strait. Incursions of papaya fruit fly and melon fly from northern infested areas of Papua New Guinea into the southern Torres Strait have demanded specific actions to reduce the risk of mainland establishment of flies.

A strategy based on the proactive treatment of northern Torres Strait islands with the male annihilation blocks that are used to attract and kill exotic fruit fly has significantly reduced the threat, based on recent fruit fly trapping results. This blocking has been undertaken by DPI staff with the assistance of island residents and is run in conjunction and collaboration with AQIS, which has responsibility for managing insect traps designed to monitor the effectiveness of the program and provide early warning of infestation. The most recent monitoring indicates no sign of papaya fruit flies within the trapping network in the Torres Strait. This success is attributed largely to the blocking program, which will continue in 2001-02.

Screw-worm fly is also considered a major risk agent, and Northwatch staff have been active in providing assessment of the Cape York livestock buffer area and liaising with AQIS on infestations in northern neighbours and risks of incursions through potential animal movements. Northwatch project staff work closely with regional community groups to maintain awareness of exotic pests and diseases.

**Ms MALE:** The Department of Primary Industries is very involved in the government's Smart State strategy. I know the application of research, development and extension can greatly assist farmers increase their production and ultimately get better returns. Minister, at point 4 on page 1-10 of the MPS you mention applying biotechnology to improve surveillance and diagnosis of pests and

diseases. Can you describe some examples of successful biological management of pests and diseases resulting from departmental research?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I believe our department has one of the leading biopesticides research teams in Australia. They recently made an important breakthrough with successful field tests of a new fungalbiopesticide against the heliothis pest populations, with little effect on other beneficial insect predators and parasites. They also found that derivatives of European forest toadstools provide a broad spectrum soft option disease control in avocados. Further research using environmentally safe fungicides is continuing across a whole range of crops, including citrus, mangoes, passionfruit and custard apples, and is expected to have a critical part to play in plant disease control in the future.

The DPI research has also led to commercialisation of an environmentally friendly trapping system for sheep blowfly, a \$150 million annual pest problem. Lucitrap works by selectively luring and trapping blowflies using compounds that smell like wet sheep. It may also find use for cattle buffalo fly. Does that make sense to you, Howard?

**Mr HOBBS:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You weren't listening?

**Mr HOBBS:** I wasn't, no.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will talk to you about it later on.

**Mr HOBBS:** This is very similar to all the questions you are getting from your side. These are very sleepy questions.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You are a woolgrower. I thought it would have interested you.

Research to control the giant wood moth, a potential threat to Queensland's hardwood plantations, has found that the moth can be trapped by using pheromones, which is a sex scent. \$1.4 million will be invested over four years for the early detection, identification and response capacity to pest and disease for plants and animals by further developing the DPI's diagnostics effort through the use of DNA technology.

This innovative science and technology will be used to develop diagnostic techniques which will directly impact on high-value primary products and trade and market development for Queensland's industries, particularly the livestock industry. These include generic molecular technology available to underpin exotic pest and disease preparedness and monitoring; ability to comply in a cost-effective manner with increasing stringent strategic surveillance requirements for major exporters to meet European Union standards; food safety quality assurance and consumer satisfaction; overcoming non-tariff trade barriers; and maintaining Queensland's global competitiveness in food and fibre chains. The need for a high level of competence in these areas has never been more apparent, with 50 incursions in the past two years of exotic pests and plant diseases and the two most serious animal health disease outbreaks of modern times, BSE and foot-and-mouth disease.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, I would like to talk about technical innovation, which is anything but sleepy. At point 1 on page 1-10 of the MPS the influence of technical innovation on profit is referred to. Can you describe examples of significant commercial uptake of the department's research and technical innovation by Queensland's food and fibre industries?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Certainly. Our department has produced a constant stream of technically innovative research outputs that have had widespread commercial uptake by Queensland's food and fibre industries. Our department is continuing this technical innovation to develop a wide range of solutions to meet the economic, social and environmental expectations of our consumers and also of our communities.

Queensland's farmers are using DPI's research in biopesticides and integrated pest management. The result is reduced chemical use, with flow-on benefits for farm sustainability. Water environmental quality examples are the success of the area-wide management strategies for heliothis control on the Darling Downs and the reduction in chemical usage by the Queensland banana industry of 93 per cent over 15 years, with the remaining chemicals being far less toxic.

<sup>004</sup> Our research has led to great improvements in the quality of premium fruit on retail shelves. Our department has significantly influenced how fruit such as mangoes, avocados and stone fruit are stored, transported, handled and stacked. The result is a higher premium product, a more satisfied consumer and a better return to the grower. A specific example is a recent joint DPI and industry development of a new mango variety that has brought premium prices on export markets and significantly improved returns to Queensland producers. I think that is the Tango mango that made those great inroads into Paris the year before last, when the Tango mango sold at \$38 per mango. It replaced the French wines as being the thing to take to a party in Paris in those days.

Our department has also developed atmosphere-control technology to enable longer term storage, and sea freight of fresh fruit and vegetables was taken up by large commercial organisations and further developed for commercial application. Other departmental intellectual property is finding greater commercial application and significant increasing demand. Two recent examples are the lucitrap—and this is what I was referring to previously, Howard—an environmentally friendly trapping system for sheep blowfly, the industry's most serious pest, and a commercial partnership to develop and commercialise a low-cost fruit fly disinfection technology to enable Queensland's producers to meet import protocols of various overseas markets.

A commercial investment venture between DPI and a number of industry partners has recently been approved. Research using biotechnology and other world-first scientific approaches will give Queensland a definite competitive advantage and lead to the development of a significant soft shell crab industry in Queensland. Of course, we have our climate change research, which has enabled our DPI to produce and publish reliable seasonal climate forecasts.

**Ms NOLAN:** Minister, I refer to page 1-9 dot point one of the 2001-02 MPS, which refers to developing expert predictive systems. I note the government's commitment to long-range climate forecasting via the Queensland Centre for Climate Applications, an initiative of your department and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. Minister, can you describe what research is being done to help Queensland's primary producers cope with the wild and unpredictable nature of Queensland's weather?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think as all committee members would know, Queensland probably would have the most variable climate in the world. Therefore, we really need to be on the front foot to try to make reasonable predictions of what our climate is going to be in the not-too-distant future. So the DPI has developed and is

developing innovative strategic research programs to provide predictive capabilities to better manage and capitalise on the climatic variability affecting this state.

Ongoing effort will need to be maintained to further improve predictive climate science research, and this will include the need for climate forecast models to be integrated into other predictive models. These predictive models include crop yield models, trade models and economic models. Expert systems will be produced that will harness all the output from the predictive models to then provide a practical management system that will be of immense benefit to both the Queensland agricultural and general communities. DPI targets climate and crop outlook information to growers directly and via rural regional media, weekly web climate notes, the SOI hotline, climate workshops and web fact sheets.

The department has developed expert decision-making tools for farmers which are widely available. Some of these are Rainman, which is a software on CD that allows easy analysis of rainfall data for better farm management; and Whopper Cropper, which is software that combines crop modelling with climate science. It can indicate the potential yield of many crops under different management and environmental conditions to assist growers to make informed decisions.

The DPI's biotechnologists are also confident of transferring drought-resistant genes, identified recently in a sorghum variety, to other crops. A world-first guide to climate forecasting applications has been developed to provide better use of seasonal climate outlooks across the community. The guide, which is called *Applications of climate forecasting in agricultural and natural ecosystems—the Australian experience*, will allow ecology, agriculture, environmental planning and climate science professionals to make better use of seasonal climate outlooks.

Our Centre for Climate Applications will continue the development and implementation of climate forecast applications in areas of grain, cotton, sugar, beef and sheep industries. QCCA will identify other food and fibre sector industries whose outputs could be most significantly improved by climate forecast applications, that is, horticulture, aquaculture, forestry and fisheries, and develop application activities where appropriate.

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

**Mr ROWELL:** Minister, I would just like to make a comment that it is difficult for the opposition, when you are trying to frame questions on the budget, when you do not have up-to-date information. I would like to thank the director-general for the figures that he has produced. But in reply to my question on notice No. 1, you stated that 98 staff had been transferred from the Queensland Fisheries Service to the food and fibre science and innovation output last year. Given that staff numbers in the output dropped from 1,531 to 1,529 and all other output staff dropped or were static over the same period, what happened to the staff that were presumably displaced with the addition of the 98 staff from the Queensland Fisheries Service?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Quite obviously, the honourable member is referring to our Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, which of course is doing a mighty job out there in the community. I have detailed for the benefit of our committee here this morning some of the great innovative research that the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences is doing. At the end of the day, some of those staff changes basically are internal measures. And to give the honourable member a more detailed response, I will ask Barry McDonald, who is the acting executive director of the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, to further comment on that issue. But rest assured, committee

members, that the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, as it is in place currently, is the largest research organisation of any state in Australia.

**Mr McDONALD:** There was a decline in staff, as you have identified, and that gave us an opportunity to engage in some reinvestment of funding to more strategic areas to meet government priorities we have. So the numbers stayed roughly the same. There was a progressive decline in the number of staff over that year.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Basically, what Barry is saying is that whilst there was a decline in staff, unfortunately the people who work in the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences are so well regarded within the private sector that we are losing many of our scientists to outside organisations. It is as simple as that.

**Mr ROWELL:** Is the 98 valid? That is probably the question I am asking.

**Dr HOEY:** Of those 120 vacancies that I mentioned that are in the pipeline, almost 50 of those are within the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences. So you need to take that into account, too.

**Mr ROWELL:** Thanks for the last-minute—

**Dr HOEY:** That is up to date as of yesterday. So I am giving you the most up-to-date figures.

**Mr ROWELL:** Dealing with market access and development staff, certainly as you have identified the DPI has to deal with—and I note in your answer to my question on notice No. 3 that some 270 staff have had to be seconded to the fire ant response team. And yes, it is good to see that you have an additional 400 people in there at this present time on a temporary basis. Many are from non-related units of the DPI. I also note you have attributed an estimated \$2 million worth of new exports to the market access and development output last year. Of course, we all know how vital new markets are to improve the viability of Queensland's primary industries. Can you explain why then that staff numbers in the market access and development output have been cut from 554 in 1999-2000 to 481 this year?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** If we are talking about market access and trade development, let me just say that we have really got to give credit where credit is due. The Department of Primary Industries has certainly achieved outstanding trade outcomes over the past two years, and I see trade development as one of the very high priorities of the Department of Primary Industries in the future. Now, an allocation of approximately \$1.8 million was expended last year on trade development and its allied activities of expanding trade capability through value adding and diversification.

I can talk about that a bit longer, but the best way to illustrate this is—I have just come back from taking a very successful trade delegation of people in the pig industry to Japan and Taiwan, where we found in both countries that we in Queensland are regarded as a clean, safe producer, which is something that we should really try to maintain; because at the end of the day, that is the best way that we will be able to sell our produce.

Now, I believe quite firmly that under our current programs within the Department of Primary Industries—and of course, Dr Peter White is the executive director in that area—in one industry alone, that is, the pig industry, we are going to grow that industry by 300 per cent in three years. I do not make that prediction lightly; I make that prediction with conviction, because I believe we can do it. And with the interest that is being shown by people in Japan and by people in Taiwan, I am quite sure we will be able to do that, because we are already really targeting

that Singapore market, where we are supplying about 10.7 per cent of their entire crop now.

We have been trying to get an answer for you, Mark. You referred to the 1999-2000 data. Could you just clarify that again? We do not have that with us.

**Mr ROWELL:** I was speaking about 1999-2000—a cut from 554 to 481. That is the projection for this year.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We will take it on notice. But Mark, I think the reason for that discrepancy is basically people coming off line after the papaya fruit fly program ended successfully some time early last year, I think it was. We will take it on notice and get you a more detailed response there, okay? But I think that is the response that is correct; basically, that it was the winding up of the papaya fruit fly campaign. And as we wound up the papaya fruit fly campaign, we are winding up the fire ant campaign now.

**Mr JOHNSTON:** In addition to the papaya fruit fly, there would have been a significant number that relates to the CSA movement out at DPI, because they are spread across our outputs, and as they moved out quite a significant number of people would have gone against each of our outputs. So the two things, the papaya fruit fly and the CSA, would together make up that reduction.

**Mr ROWELL:** In notes 2 and 4 to the output statement of the Food and Fibre Sciences and Innovation on page 1-12 you refer to an increase in demand for research and extension services. Now that I have had an explanation, it makes it a little bit clearer that it seems that there are going to be another 120 positions made available. I just want you to comment on that. On the other hand, page 1-7 shows staff numbers in policy analysis, and industry development output increasing from 60 to 71. This is a good reflection of the shift in priorities, I believe, in DPI under the government. Why are you directing more effort into talkfests and butcher's paper rather than increasing the effort in the productivity and marketing ends that actually put more dollars into the pockets of primary producers?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the end of the day, I believe your criticism is unwarranted. You are basically criticising—

**Mr ROWELL:** An 18 per cent increase.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The increasing of staffing from 60 to 71.

**Mr ROWELL:** An 18 per cent increase.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is coming from a very low base, but at the end of the day, unless you have the policy, you cannot provide the goods for our primary producers. This is all part of the refocusing of the Department of Primary Industries to the consumer end. As I keep saying over and over again, no matter where I go—whether it is in the parliament, whether it is at this committee or whether it is out there making speeches—the Department of Primary Industries is focusing on the consumer. That refocus is that, unless the consumer wants the product, it is no good producing it. That is why it is so important to get our policy in place, to find out what our niche markets are and to target those niche markets. I mentioned the Tango mango earlier, which is certainly providing an important niche. We have other niche markets that we can target in the grains industry in Japan. We need the policy to be able to get ourselves organised to be able to penetrate those markets.

An increase of 11 staff in the policy and industry development unit, I believe, is a criticism that is unworthy, because at the end of the day, if that increase in staff provides the much-needed impetus to be able to have our primary producers target

those niche markets overseas, the better off our primary producers will be. If you talk to them out there—as I know you do and I am quite sure that they will say the same thing—the satisfaction rate with the Department of Primary Industries last year was well over 90 per cent, and I think that stands for itself. Perhaps John Pollock would like to add something to that.

**Mr POLLOCK:** The increase in staff is slight, but it is addressing probably our widening role and a lot of them are not to do with butcher's paper and talkfests. We have quite an active interest in issues like the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, servicing the evaluation of water allocation and management plans, and servicing the continuing needs of the sugar industry as we support the industry and move to continue its self-regulation and self-management. So the staff numbers have been most welcomed by us, but they are areas in which we are applying them.

**Mr ROWELL:** Despite a fall in staff—and it looks as if we have not got a fall in staff now that it has been identified for the Food and Fibre Sciences and Innovation output—employees' expenses increased by nearly \$6.1 million.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Which page are you on?

**Mr ROWELL:** I am talking about the Food and Fibre Sciences and Innovation. It is page 1-12. I was just saying that employees' expenses have increased by nearly \$6.1 million in the same period on last year's budget to \$90.623 million in 2000-01. What was the reason for this massive increase? It is a 7 per cent increase.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, in relation to your initial question about the relationship between staff numbers and employee expenses, it is difficult to compare staff numbers and employee expenses. Estimated staff numbers are at a point in time. That is 30 June. During the year numbers can fluctuate considerably, including through the use of temporary and casual staff and various projects. Staff may increase at certain times during the year, thus increasing employee expenses while numbers are less as at 30 June. This particularly applies to the cyclical nature of research projects. I think, at the end of the day, if you have a look at the Queensland Fisheries Service, the research staff from the Queensland Fisheries Service went across to AFFS. So that should account for the question that you are asking in relation to the answer that I am giving you.

So at the end of the day, staff numbers and employee expenses do not readily align. Importantly, there really have not been any significant changes in departmental structure in classification levels, nor salary increases above enterprise bargaining which would affect employee expenses. So we might get—

**Mr ROWELL:** In other words, what you are saying is that the budget paper is not worth what it is written on.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** No, I am not saying that at all.

**Mr ROWELL:** Because it is fluctuating; it is moving all over the place. You put out a budget paper and then there are all sorts of variances coming in at the last minute.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is not what we are saying at all.

**Mr ROWELL:** That is how I read the paper.

**Dr HOEY:** Just to reinforce the point that the minister has made for the honourable member, over the year the staff numbers in AFFS have fluctuated by more than 100. So if you just judge the expenses based on the staff at the end of the year, which was actually the low point, it does not give an adequate representation of all of those expenses that were incurred throughout the year. So in order to match



that, you have to get some sort of a median figure, which we do not have in the MPS.

**Mr ROWELL:** Perhaps an explanatory note would assist if you are doing that sort of thing.

**Dr HOEY:** It is a particularly difficult thing to do. I am happy to follow it up, but I think the general principle is that the average staff number was much higher than they were at the end of the year and that would explain a fair bit of that. It is an issue with all of our MPSs in all situations where there have been fluctuations in numbers.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay. Can the minister inform the committee what the department's expenditure on travel was in the last financial year, both domestic and international? Can you also indicate how much of the expenditure was funded by the private sector?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me just start by basically saying that within the Department of Primary Industries, especially within our Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences, we have world-renowned scientists working on various initiatives. The services of these people is much sought after at conferences and seminars overseas. In that regard, as the minister I encourage our top scientists to travel, but one of the provisos is that our scientists get as much of the funding from external sources as possible, and that basically is happening currently. As far as internal travel within the Department of Primary Industries, as you would know we have about 150 officers located throughout the state. It is also important for our executive directors and other people to be able to visit these centres.

Just recently our director-general made a comprehensive trip visiting as many of our offices in Queensland as he could to talk about a variety of issues. On the issue of how much money was spent, the department spent \$6.972 million on domestic travel in the 2000-01 financial year, but this amount also includes payments for domestic air fares, meals, taxis, accommodation and other travel expenses. Travel service provider contracts have yielded significant savings against published fares, and the total level of domestic travel savings due to the use of travel contracts between July 2000 and May 2001 was over \$300,000 after the exercise of available advance purchase options.

In terms of official overseas travel, 209 trips were scheduled by Department of Primary Industries staff from 1 July 2000 to 30 June 2001 with a projected total of \$802,000 being expended for overseas travel. Of course, there were savings there as well. So as I have said previously—

**Mr ROWELL:** And the private sector component?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Unfortunately, I do not have that figure with me.

**Mr ROWELL:** Can you take it on notice?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will take that on notice and I will certainly get back to you when we have that information. But what we have to understand is this: our department has corporate standards which outline the policy and procedures for undertaking domestic and overseas travel for official business. As you would know, the minister approves all overseas travel.

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

**Ms MALE:** On page 1-9 dot point two and 1-10 dot point seven of the 2001-02 Ministerial Portfolio Statements you mention integrated land use and drought-

resistant sorghum varieties. How is your department investing in the development of sustainable production systems?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Our department has recognised the importance of ethical resource use and is committed to research regulation and risk assessment to enhance the sustainability of our production systems. An amount of \$6.3 million was invested in water use efficiency activities for sustainable production. For example, our current research is investigating multiple-use farming systems. These integrate existing farm activities—cotton, grain, sugar, forestry—with aquaculture. The benefit is the flexible and sustainable use of fresh water and saline ground water as well as a more efficient water use and the restoration of degraded habitats.

A new drought-resistant sorghum variety has been developed, which would increase grain production and grain quality without increasing water usage. Our researchers are also confident that their work with sorghum could apply to all cereal crops. Our department is working to increase irrigation efficiency and to have at least 70 per cent of cotton and grain irrigators using best management practice. Our DPI staff in Emerald, Biloela, Dalby, Goondiwindi and St George will help make improvements in water use efficiency through grower education and engagement. An amount of \$1.7 million was allocated to major chemical residue management programs in partnership with state and national governments. The programs are designed to clearly demonstrate the high rates of compliance of Queensland primary produce when measured against internationally acceptable standards. This information is of critical importance for trade and to meet consumer concerns in relation to the sustainable use of our resources.

The key chemical residue management programs and activities which contribute to sustainable resource use are the National Organochlorine Management Program—which is the acronym NORM—and the National Endosulfin Management program. The NORM program focuses on the active management of OC residues at farm level to identify contaminated areas and to prevent cattle accessing areas of contamination. The program offers technical advice to producers in the development of residue management plans and a thorough auditing program.

As part of the OC program, the DPI residue detector dog, who is called Norm, is now fully operational and working on farms to help identify contaminated sites. Norm worked on 73 properties in 2000-01 and also provided services to New South Wales agriculture and the EPA. The endosulfin management program activities include promoting risk management strategies to endosulfin users and their beef producing neighbours and monitoring significant regulatory changes through on-farm audits. The program has been highly successful with no residues greater than half the allowable level being reported in beef originating from cotton-growing shires. An amount of \$200,000 was invested in the area of economic and risk assessments to determine the relationships between crop yields and grain cropping practice such as minimum tillage and reduced chemical usage.

<sup>006</sup> The economics of introducing soya bean and sugarcane crop rotations on cane farms is also being examined. Rotations such as this will reduce the need for nitrogen fertiliser, which will improve run-off water quality, soil structure and soil water-holding capacity.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, before I ask my next question I must say how disappointed I am that you did not bring samples of the Tango mango.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We had them for breakfast, I am sorry.

**Ms STONE:** Recently, the Premier announced Queensland's Living Legends. I note the Chief Scientist of the Department of Primary Industries, Dr Joe Baker, was among the recipients. On page 1-8, paragraph 3, of the 2001-02 MPS, you mention the Office of the Chief Scientist and the role of the Queensland Food and Fibre Science and Innovation Council. What have been the achievements of your department's Office of the Chief Scientist and the council?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is quite obvious that you have asked a question about our Living Legend, Dr Joe Baker, because he is not here today. If he was here, he would be most embarrassed about having the question asked about him. In his absence, I will certainly refer to our Queensland Chief Scientist, Dr Joe Baker, OBE.

Under his leadership, the Office of the Chief Scientist in the Department of Primary Industries has actively promoted concepts of innovation and sustainable development. In passing, I really want to mention again that Dr Joe Baker is a very eminent Queenslander. No doubt, as the question indicated, you are aware that he recently received one of the five Queensland Greats awards recognising him as a person who shares the vision and ideals of Queensland and as someone who has played a significant role in the history and the development of the state, not excluding his great ability as an A-grade Rugby League winger in Queensland in the sixties. That was before my time.

Under Dr Baker, the Office of the Chief Scientist has provided scientific and technological leadership to the DPI and ensured that important science and technology policy perspectives are included in the development of government policy. The office performs a major role in servicing the Queensland Food and Fibre Science and Innovation Council, which I chair. I would really recommend to members of the committee that, if you want to see a committee that really works to its full ability, sit in and listen to what happens at our innovation council meetings. I believe that Joe's office performs a major role in servicing the Queensland Food and Fibre Science Innovation Council.

What the Office of Chief Scientist has also developed is strong international links by working with the Australian Centre for International Agriculture Research and developing international consultancy opportunities in Asia, Africa and the Pacific. Many of our scientists whom I mentioned previously work in these different areas as part of their movement overseas.

In relation to the other part of your question, the Queensland Food and Fibre Science and Innovation Council was established in the year 2000. It has a broad charter to provide strategic advice to the government on food and fibre science and innovation and related matters. The council has met on three occasions and will again meet next week.

Working groups of the council have been active in progressing council business between meetings and the council has considered a wide range of topics in its analysis and recommendations. It is currently progressing the following proposals to profile and manage aquaculture as a distinct agricultural sector in Queensland. You will remember that in the *Prospects* publication, aquaculture is growing at a rate of about 14 per cent per year. This includes possibilities for a significant sustainable expansion of the industry. The council has recommended that business plans for particular aquaculture species and systems of production be developed to define the investment and information requirements for possible future development.

The council is also developing models of strategic public and private sector partnerships that will enhance collaboration and outputs from innovation in the public sector. It is currently analysing government policy for handling intellectual property and is preparing recommendations on options to improve the outcomes from commercialisation of intellectual property generated by our DPI research.

Part of the council's role is also to advise on matters of sustainable rural development. It is formulating proposals on ways to encourage innovation and the sustainable development of people in rural and regional communities linked to food and fibre industries. As minister, it is a very exciting forum and I am very proud to be part of that process.

**Ms NOLAN:** This Queensland Government has prided itself on being a government for all Queenslanders. I note the government's commitment to taking government to the people and improving their access to government information and services. I refer to page 1-21 of the MPS. How is your department harnessing new technologies to improve the delivery of departmental services to those Queenslanders living in rural communities?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Firstly, I state that the DPI shop online is really an innovative alliance of the Department of Primary Industries, the University of Queensland Bookshop and the Commonwealth Bank. The DPI book distribution centre has benefited from the University of Queensland bookshop's considerable experiences in online shopping systems and the bank's merchant services. The alliance has resulted in considerable savings in time and infrastructure costs to the department and enabled the DPI shop online to be launched within nine weeks of the acceptance by the director-general of a cost-benefit analysis for e-commerce based on the department's book distribution centre. Could I ask Jan Stone, our new Director of the Office of Rural Communities, to add to that?

**Ms J. STONE:** Honourable members, I am sure that you are all very familiar with the QGAP offices, as most of you have QGAP offices in your electorates. We now have a number of those QGAP offices expanding. We will have up to 66 sites in the near future. At present, we have developed a technology system, a management information system, that provides web-based access to Queensland government services online. The other element of the QGAP offices with the web-based technology system that we have is that we can also provide a number of Commonwealth government and other services. We currently provide up to 400 services online. The ability that we have to expand these is looking very advantageous in the future.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Thank you, Jan.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, according to the DPI, the value of food and fibre exports increased to \$5.8 billion in 1999-2000. I understand that is a record for Queensland primary industries. Page 1-14 of the 2001-02 Ministerial Portfolio Statements makes reference to expanding overseas markets for Queensland food and fibre. Can you advise the committee on the future prospects for Queensland food and fibre exports and whether there are any indicators pointing to future successes?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Department of Primary Industries has achieved outstanding trade outcomes over the last two years and I see trade development as one of the high priorities of the Department of Primary Industries in the future. An allocation of approximately \$1.8 million was expended last year on trade development and its allied activities of expanding trade capability through value adding and diversification. The return on this investment was phenomenal.

The food and fibre trade missions to the Middle East yielded new exports of over \$2 million in two years. I will confirm that that refers to the trade delegation that I led to the Middle East a couple of years ago. Yes, luckily I was a part of that. As a result of the relationships that were developed on these missions, Queensland companies forecast that, in the next five years, they will be trading an additional \$5 million in the region.

A trade mission to the United States in November 2000 resulted in immediate sales of \$100,000. Mission participants predict that sales will grow by about \$2.5 million in the next five years as well. Development of the supply chain network, Aus Food Exports, was coordinated by the Rural Market Development Division over the next three years and this network is now exporting over \$9 million per year to overseas markets.

I believe that the future prospects for Queensland food and fibre exports is very promising. Heightened consumer awareness of food safety issues and the problems that have occurred in Europe with BSE and foot-and-mouth have opened the door to long-term opportunities. I say 'long-term' because world awareness of Queensland's record in producing safe food, together with its environmentally friendly image, is selling product faster than we can produce it.

Rural Market Development staff moved quickly to capitalise on a window of opportunity that recently arose in Japan for GMO-free soya beans. A trade visit led by the department resulted in sales of over \$1 million being achieved in the last 12 months. Again, the future is very bright following visits by Japanese buyers who wish to establish long-term trading relationships with Queensland grain companies. I met one of those people when I was in Japan. He is coming back very shortly to increase his orders from Queensland, which is very good news for our grain industry on the Darling Downs. I think that it will grow exponentially.

Increased trade inquiries from overseas buyers for fresh and processed products as well as a range of fibre products indicate the raised level of interest in Queensland as a source of supply. As minister, I intend to ensure that these successes will grow. The Rural Market Development Division's work in trade development, value chains and diversification and value adding will continue. I look forward to being able to advise the committee next year of the new successes that have been achieved. I believe we have done quite well up until now. We will just build on the successes that we have put together over the past three years markedly in the coming years.

**Ms STONE:** I too wish to ask you about trade export. I refer you to page 1-14 of the MPS, particularly dot points 6 and 7. I ask: what is your department doing to increase and improve export opportunities, particularly for the Queensland beef industry?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I am proud to announce that since June 1998, the value of beef and live cattle exports from Queensland has increased from \$1.5 billion in 1998 to more than \$2.2 billion last year. DPI works with all beef industry sectors to enhance domestic and export market development. A key example is the Global Beef project. Here, state and federal agencies cooperate with beef industry sectors to market Queensland beef around the world. Global Beef uses marketplace missions, supply chain developments, trade business missions and beef alliance activities to build trade relationships and develop market opportunities.

On the news last night, we saw the Australian swimming team in Japan for the world championships. Ian Thorpe, Michael Klim and others were being interviewed.

If you looked closely at the background, they were being sponsored by Aussie Beef. No matter where you go in Japan, whether you are on a railway station, at a corporate table or in any sort of a meeting, as soon as you speak of Aussie Beef, the immediate reaction of the Japanese people is, 'Aussie beef', and they make this sign with their hands. That is the symbol. That is etched in their minds. It has been around for the past eight or nine years, and it is a great selling point. We are trying to build on that. I think Ian Thorpe and some of our swimmers are the greatest advertisement for our primary produce, because they are world champions.

Another example is the Blue Gum beef supply chain program. A group of Queensland beef producers formed an alliance with companies in the transport, processing, food, service and retail sectors. Blue Gum delivers a guaranteed quality beef product that satisfies consumers and provides better profitability for the supply chain participants.

Beef trade development activities were boosted by the Premier's visit to the Middle East and Asia. The Premier provided high-level support to help exporters increase access to new markets. On that point, I think all members of the committee will appreciate the fact that our Premier has certainly become a very staunch advocate and salesperson for Queensland's primary industries. It is so good to see him leading trade delegations overseas to access new markets for our primary products.

Live cattle exports currently are small but are a critical aspect of Queensland's beef trade strategy. Around seven per cent of Queensland's cattle turn-off are exported live each year. Markets in Asia and the Middle East demand live cattle imports because of religious, cultural and practical distribution issues. Markets that receive live cattle also show development for fresh and frozen beef products.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The portion of time for government members has expired. The committee will now break for morning tea and resume its hearing at 10.15.

Sitting suspended from 9.59 a.m. to 10.16 a.m.

<sup>007</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio area of the Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to page 1-1 of the MPS. In the Departmental Overview under Strategic Issues, you say that the Department of Primary Industries is driving growth and building the capacity for innovative food and fibre industries and confident communities in the rural sector. That is a very admirable view to have and a target for which to aim. However, on the next page, page 1-2, we look at what you are proposing for rural community development. You say that the social, economic and regional impacts of such adjustments on industry and communities will be monitored and analysed to advise on and prepare strategies for rural communities. So on the one hand we have DPI driving growth and building capacity and on the other hand we have rural communities being monitored and analysed. Are you out of ideas for rural communities and, if not, how do you propose to drive growth and build capacity in rural communities in this budget?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, let me reject that—

**Mr HOBBS:** It is there.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:**—assessment by the member for Warrego. Quite obviously the Department of Primary Industries is really trying to drive growth through our rural communities. If need be, I can go through some great things that are occurring through a number of our rural communities, many of which are in the member's own electorate.

**Mr HOBBS:** You said you are monitoring and analysing. That is what it says.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In some instances we do monitor and we do analyse, but at the end of the day we do run specific programs to improve the capacities of our rural communities to restore numbers into our rural communities. We do that in a number of ways. Let me instance the Queensland Rural Ministerial Advisory Council, which I chair. That council meets three times each year. I believe that the achievements of that council—

**Mr HOBBS:** What is the relevance of that?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:**—stand us in good stead. Let's talk about our rural partnerships initiatives. They are basically very successful in fostering a community driven approach to managing the changes generated by an increasingly integrated and competitive global economy. We have nine rural partnership development offices across the state, and they are assisting over 60 rural industry groups to develop diversification, marketing and rural revitalisation strategies. Since its formation in January 1997, the partnerships initiative has assisted communities to access almost \$4.8 million in funding for rural development projects. However, the key result of rural partnership activities is jobs growth and retention through enhanced business capacity. Their work in sugar regions exemplifies how they are actually achieving these outcomes. The Townsville-based rural partnership office has run sugar leadership development workshops in Gordonvale, Tully and the Burdekin. This has resulted in six projects to date in relation to harvesting, technology and sugar quality run by growers themselves. Dr White, would you like to add to that? That is what you get for wearing that red wool jacket.

**Mr HOBBS:** He is out of time. I refer to page 1-22, note 1, where you state that the decrease in the estimated actual for 2000-01 in the output operating statement is because of the contribution to the licensed buyback of the east coast trawl management plan. What has licensed buyback got to do with the rural community development budget? We do not really need a lecture on the state-federal government relationship in regards to that, as you mentioned before. This is a state issue. Will you replace that funding that has been siphoned off to meet other shortfalls in this next budget?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I beg to differ with the member. This is not a state issue. The east coast trawl management plan is a federal issue.

**Mr HOBBS:** The funding has come out of Rural Communities.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The east coast trawl plan has been forced on the state government—

**Mr HOBBS:** So you are taking money out of Rural Communities?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:**—by the federal government. As part of implementing the federal government's plan—

**Mr HOBBS:** You have taken the money out of the Rural Communities budget.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:**—we as a government had to contribute \$10 million towards that plan. As you would know, initially the plan was going to be a \$30 million plan which would include \$10 million from the commercial fishing sector, but unfortunately that could not occur. Our Queensland government's contribution to this scheme is \$10 million. There is a federal contribution of \$10 million to this scheme and, as I said previously, industry could not contribute their \$10 million basically due to legal complications. So through this \$20 million scheme, 98 boats and 10.8 per cent of total fishing effort were removed from fisheries.

**Mr HOBBS:** With great respect, that has nothing to do with the Rural Communities budget. You have taken the money out of the budget. We are saying to you that that has nothing to do with that at all. Are you going to place that money back into the Rural Communities budget?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** If you let me answer—

**Mr HOBBS:** All you are doing is taking money out—

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the member to cease interjecting and let the minister continue.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me just continue with what I am saying.

**Mr HOBBS:** What a waste of time. We know the answer. We know what you are going to say. You said it before.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I will keep saying it over and over again until we get it off pat.

**Mr HOBBS:** What a waste of time.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In addition, industry offered up to a five per cent immediate reduction in fishing effort with implementation of the management plan. This was in the place of the \$10 million contribution to the scheme. I will ask Dr Hoey to continue the answer. He will refer to the rural communities sector.

**Dr HOEY:** In response to the honourable member's question, there are, as he would realise, fisheries impacts in rural communities. In fact, we have only just come back from a community cabinet meeting, and a number of the deputations which we listened to and responded to were to deal with those fisheries impacts. If anything, it can bring home to a person like me that there are effects on people and their communities. It is the stories you are hearing as a part of the adjustment with the east coast trawl fisheries. To me there is a direct linkage, in response to your earlier question, about how broad are rural communities and what are we doing. That is one area where it is extremely relevant.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, but it was not allocated in the previous budget. I would say that that money did come out of other funds. Let me move on. I note that you opened four new QGAP offices last year. One has been delayed in the construction phase. I would like to point out that eight QGAP offices were opened the previous year. In your Future Developments for this forthcoming budget you have none, apart from developing a model for indigenous communities. Does this mean the QGAP program has now stalled?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** No—far from it. I will ask Jan Stone, our director for our Office of Rural Communities, to respond to that. Perhaps we can talk about some of the great work we are going to do within the indigenous communities as well, Jan.

**Ms J. STONE:** The focus for this year for the QGAP area in the Office of Rural Communities is in the development of an indigenous model. As you know from the experience that most of the members have with the QGAP offices, the model that we have at present works very, very well and is scalable and translatable across Queensland. With an indigenous model, a great more time and effort has to be taken into consideration of how these things are going to be developed, how they are going to be run, how we are going to engage community members in not only training as a QGAP agent, but the broader training for the community in terms of small business opportunities and those sorts of things.

Our concentration this year is very much on the indigenous model because, with the government's plan for Cape York Partnerships, we hope that the



indigenous model that we develop at Yarrabah will then be able to be translated and perhaps rolled out through the cape. If this model proves to be successful—and we certainly think it will be because there is a great deal of enthusiasm at the moment at the Yarrabah area—we believe that then we can offer that model towards the Cape York Partnerships program. With Cape York Partnerships, of course, these activities that are going to be rolled out through the cape have to be taken up by the communities themselves.

As part of the Yarrabah process we are also doing a lot more consultation and broader negotiation to make sure that rolling out QGAPs through the cape will not be seen as a top-down model, that it will be seen as a bottom-up model with people wanting to take these on and seeing opportunities within their own communities for particularly training of some of the younger indigenous people in the cape communities.

**Mr HOBBS:** How many would you think are likely to roll out in the near future?

**Ms J. STONE:** I would hope that we would go to all of the indigenous communities in the cape. But because part of the philosophy of the Cape York Partnerships is that the local communities need to take ownership of some of these activities themselves, we are hoping that everybody would want to take ownership of the QGAP agency in each of those communities, but it will be very much a case of gauging the response of each community on a needs basis.

I think one of the things that will probably encourage indigenous communities to take a QGAP agency on board is that not only can we roll out Queensland government services through the QGAP agencies, but we can also roll out Commonwealth services. I do not know how far we can go because there is a whole range of services we can roll out. As you know, we have the NRMA insurance, possibly Centrelink and possibly the rural transaction centres. I guess this year we are consolidating for a point in time to see how broadly we can develop those agencies. As well as that, as you know, Access Queensland is a major government project at the moment which is looking at the generic roll-out of government services, and we are also heavily involved in consultation negotiation with Access Queensland as to how the QGAP model fits within that overall generic service delivery.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is right. Access Queensland is catching up with the technology that our QGAP offices have out there in our rural communities.

**Mr HOBBS:** But there will be no more QGAP offices in the rest of Queensland. You are just working on the model alone. You have stopped doing other ones.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We are working on the model, that is right.

**Ms J. STONE:** We really need to take a fair bit of time in developing this indigenous model. Because we have some very successful QGAP offices already out there, it is timely and very sensible to take a pause in time to look at how the QGAP model will fit in with the overall Access Queensland process and how we can also roll these out into indigenous communities.

**Mr ROWELL:** We have been talking about the east coast trawl plan. In non-government question on notice No. 10 you stated that Treasury had loaned \$10 million to the DPI in 2000-01 to be repaid over five years to fund the east coast trawl management plan. You stated that in a full year the additional output appropriation from Treasury will be funded at \$2.3 million, half to be met by output revenues and half from equity sales. Can we assume the DPI will pay back \$11.5 million over the next five years and therefore Treasury is charging interest on

the loan? What assets are to be sold off to raise 50 per cent of the funds that are to become part of the equity source?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me commence my response by saying that the east coast trawl management package is being funded by an additional output appropriation of \$10 million from Treasury for the year 2000-01. The additional output appropriation from Treasury will be funded by the Department of Primary Industries from savings in operating expenses across the department and equity injections in order to assist in negating the impact on other services being delivered by the department. In a full year, the additional output appropriation from Treasury will be funded at \$2.3 million, of which half will be met from output revenue and half from equity sources. A one-off payment of \$2 million has been made on the funding as part of the 2000-01 budget process, which has reduced the planned repayments in the last two years of the original repayments schedule.

Savings from employee secondments and savings initiatives to reduce administrative expenses are largely funding this one-off payment. Resources to implement the plan have been obtained by reprioritising work in the department and the Queensland Fisheries Service. These resources—predominantly staff—have been moved from non-critical administrative operational and management activities on a needs basis. I will ask Terry Johnston, our deputy director-general, to answer the question in relation to the assets.

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, I think it is important that we acknowledge just how much is going to be paid in interest if there is an interest component.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Thank you Robert Hill. I support the National Party call for the resignation of Senator Robert Hill. I will come across to the conference and I will also be another hand up to remove Senator Robert Hill.

**Mr JOHNSTON:** I think the short answer to what would need to be sold off to repay the component of the loan that is related to equity is: only those assets that are not useful in terms of service delivery. In order to move down this track, this year we have implemented an internal asset leasing system within the department which gets the cost of ownership of assets very clearly on the table at the project level so that people who are managing projects can see what the real cost of the assets that they are managing is. That way they are free to either continue to use those assets or to get rid of them. When I say that, I mean things like the number of tractors on research stations. We often find that there are nearly as many tractors as there are people.

**Mr ROWELL:** What about the interest component?

**Mr JOHNSTON:** We have not actually got an interest component in this so much as it is a repayment of the output, which has a pseudo interest component.

**Mr ROWELL:** What does the \$2.3 million represent?

**Mr JOHNSTON:** All of the asset sales—

**Mr ROWELL:** It is \$2.3 million multiplied by five. The minister said \$2 million but we are still looking at \$2.3 million.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let us look at one of your questions on notice. You asked a question on notice in relation to consultancies and advertising.

**Mr ROWELL:** No, we are dealing with the east coast trawl plan.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes, but I am saying that we are making considerable savings in reducing our consultancies and reducing our advertising bill. Some of the

money is coming through that. If I can find that question on notice, which will give you an example of how much you have actually paid in consultancies—

**Mr ROWELL:** Can you tell us which question you are referring to?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is your question No. 7.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There was also another question.

**Mr ROWELL:** I notice that there is a big hunk for administration.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let us go to question No. 8 where you asked us to provide a list of promotional, public awareness and advertising expenditure. Expenditure on advertising for the full year amounted to \$350,000. This compares favourably to when you were in government. You expended \$832,000 on advertising. If we look at consultancies, we have expended \$539,000 this year whereas you expended \$4,137,000 in 1997-98. With these dramatic reductions in both consultancies and advertising, I am quietly confident that the department will be able to reach its targets in being able to repay the \$10 million that the Queensland Fisheries Service had imposed on it by the federal government through Senator Robert Hill to bring in the east coast trawl management plan, which of course has caused undue hardship to so many fishing families in some of those small east coast communities. It is about time Senator Robert Hill behaved as a humane person and accredited the plan so that we can have a bit of certainty back in our commercial fishing sector. Without that certainty, and as you would know, commercial fishers cannot access loans from commercial lenders in Queensland but can access loans from commercial lenders in New South Wales.

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

**Ms NOLAN:** I refer to page 1-15 dot point 6 of the MPS. I note that you have recently returned from a trade mission to Japan and Taiwan and that this trade mission specifically focused on opportunities for the Queensland pork industry. What is being done to develop the pig industry in Queensland to take advantage of overseas market opportunities?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think I alluded to my recent visit to Japan and Taiwan in a previous answer. A key objective for our government is establishing Queensland as Australia's premier pork state. A framework to achieve this objective is the pig industry strategy, which focuses on enhancing and expanding Queensland industry, increasing its exports, produce and value-added pork products. As part of this strategy, I did lead a very successful trade mission to Japan and Taiwan. I had some of the key players with me who basically represented the entire food chain in Queensland—from producers all the way through to a person from the Wulguru company, which is in the business of actually building abattoirs. So we had the complete chain with us, which was a first ever for a trade delegation from Queensland, and it worked really well.

Our big problem is that we have limited production capability to develop our exports. Japan is the largest consumer of pork in the world, with about 1.5 million tonnes consumed last year. This supply was seriously disrupted by foot-and-mouth outbreaks in Taiwan in 1997. The subsequent outbreak in Korea in 2000 and the food safety problems currently confronting Europe has resulted in a significant market opportunity for Queensland to supply pork to Japan. Once again, I re-emphasise the fact that, no matter who you speak to in Japan, they all refer to

Queensland as being a clean and safe producer. That is so very important to us and it is so very important that we maintain that status.

Unfortunately, the Queensland industry and the wider Australian pork industry have until now only taken limited advantage of these events. Australia traded 6,150 tonnes last year, which is equivalent to less than one per cent of Japan's total pork imports. However, the good news is that, following the trade mission which I led in June, prospects for tripling Queensland pork production has been buoyed by expressions of interest in Queensland pork by two of the world's largest meat companies, Nippon Meat Packers and Itoham Foods. Nippon Meat Packers has already moved to invest in the Queensland pork industry with its \$40 million Tong Park investment at a property near Warra, which is approximately 100 kilometres north-west of Toowoomba. Tong Park will produce more than 220,000 pigs annually for the export market and will employ more than 70 full-time staff. Pork exports to Singapore dramatically increased over the last 18 months as Queensland moved to maximise opportunities in that market following a virus that devastated the Malaysian pig herd. Malaysia was the main source of supply to Singapore. We certainly are filling in the void left by what happened in Malaysia.

**Ms MALE:** I refer to page 1-14 dot point 8 of the 2001-02 Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Under this government a lot of work has been undertaken to explore diverse opportunities for Queensland primary producers. What is your department doing to capture emerging niche markets for grain overseas?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think the committee would realise that the government is about capturing emerging niche markets. We are going out of our way to ensure that our primary producers are able to access those emerging niche markets, especially for grains. The department is working with regional producers and with businesses to build long-term, value-added export markets for our primary produce. We recently exported more than \$1 million worth of value-added non-GMO soya bean into Asia. The key to these exports was guaranteeing the non-GMO status of our grains. Initial shipments of GMO-free soya beans to Japan paved the way for further exports of soya beans into Thailand and Taiwan and a small shipment to Singapore. These exports were achieved by developing relationships between Queensland growers, exporting companies and also overseas buyers.

The market for non-GMO products in Japan is growing rapidly as our major competitor, the United States, experiences difficulties segregating GMO from non-GMO grain products. Japan is particularly concerned due to the recent detection of starlink corn in snack food. To capture value-added opportunities over the long term, a key unit in our department, Rural Market Development, is working in partnership with growers and overseas buyers to build supply chains to ensure sustainable trade outcomes.

In February our Rural Market Development organised and coordinated a trade visit to Japan by Queensland grain companies. This visit generated considerable interest by Japanese importers and manufacturers. This interest resulted in a visit by Japanese buyers to Queensland to explore new trade in GMO-free corn and to negotiate long-term growing contracts. Another outcome from this visit was greater interest in other GMO-free grains by Japanese manufacturers of snack foods and other corn-based products.

A key issue facing Queensland grain exports is consolidation of supply. To address this, our Rural Market Development staff facilitated the formation of the Northern Grain Alliance. This alliance is made up of 200 growers, exporters and cooperatives located across Queensland who wish to develop new trade. At the

end of the day what we are saying is that you have to be big to be able to have a ready supply of product to go to overseas markets. Our overseas markets are after consistency and a guaranteed line of supply. Given my portfolio responsibilities as Minister for Primary Industries and Rural Communities, I would like to cite the Northern Grain Alliance initiative as an excellent example of an initiative that is achieving due outcomes of value-added exports, as well as developing regional communities.

009 **Ms MALE:** I refer to point 3 on page 1-13 of the MPS. Minister, could you please outline what DPI is doing to profile Queensland food and to encourage Queenslanders to support our regional food producers?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I am glad you asked this question, Carolyn, because I am very proud of our achievements in this area. Our department is firmly committed to profiling at every opportunity the wonderful produce this state has to offer. One of our highest profile initiatives is of course the tremendously successful Queensland Signature Dish Competition and its regional spin-off events. All were inaugurated last year by our department. They have succeeded in strengthening the links between Queensland's food producers and the food service sectors. Once again, this is the new emphasis in the Department of Primary Industries—basically concentrating on the consumer.

The DPI is also leading a very significant regional cuisine project in one of Queensland's prominent wine regions, the South Burnett. At a DPI-hosted regional cuisine dinner, 150 people tasted local foods and wines. It was followed by a showcase of regional produce day. A workshop for local food, wine and tourism stakeholders was held in June to assist the region capitalise on its huge potential for culinary tourism, which is a growing area in Queensland.

Awareness of the many fine products from western Queensland will follow the running of a western local paddock to local plate initiative. This project will ensure that dollars spent in the west will stay in the west. As I am also the minister responsible for rural communities, this is important to me. Regional community development depends very strongly on regional business development. Western producers are also being assisted to display and sell their products at the Brisbane farmers markets. I can well remember Freddy Tritton being down here just recently at the farmers market at New Farm, where he was selling the fish he grows under aquaculture on his property. By about 9 o'clock in the morning he had sold out all of his fish to very eager Brisbane people who are very intrigued by names such as sooty grunter.

We have also established a southern Queensland food trail. It has also been identified through the compilation of a database of innovative food producers in the south-east. It assists chefs and food distributors in sourcing high-quality products and will be used in culinary tourism initiatives. Last weekend we had some of Australia's leading food writers and chefs at a master class meeting in Brisbane. They certainly exchanged wonderful ideas. The message that is coming out from chefs and food writers Australiawide is that Queensland is emerging as a state that is developing its own unique cuisine. At the end of the day, that will really serve us well in the tourist market. We do not want to concentrate only on the east coast; we are really concentrating on areas in western Queensland and in those areas that would really interest you, Howard. We are developing a cuisine currently for hotels through western Queensland. It is part of the Matilda Highway program.

**Ms NOLAN:** I refer to point 3 on page 1-13 of the MPS. I note your commitment to animal welfare and I note the forthcoming introduction of the historic animal care

and protection legislation into state parliament. Can you outline what has been achieved in relation to developing community accepted standards for specific animal uses?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is a very important question. Our department has a very major focus on establishing standards for animal welfare which meet community expectations and are practical. It is also playing a key role in this at a national level. Officers from the department's animal welfare unit are currently leading the development of three important national animal welfare codes on very diverse topics. These are domestic poultry, including layer hens; rodeos; and land transport of sheep. They are also reviewing standards for the farming of deer and for feral and pest animal control.

These standards for animal use are published as national animal welfare codes of practice and are used as benchmarks for animal industries, animal welfare groups and governments. More importantly, the codes are developed in consultation with representatives from all relevant sectors of the community, such as animal industries and other animal user groups, animal welfare organisations, professional organisations, such as the Australian Veterinary Association, and government.

The DPI is also developing a code for the use of animals in film and television. This is in response to international community concern at an American TV program filmed in Queensland in which a pig was apparently killed inhumanely. Although there are some guidelines in other states, Queensland is developing comprehensive standards, in consultation with the film and television industries and animal welfare groups, to safeguard the welfare of animals used in film and television. When the code is finalised, it is planned to work with the Commonwealth and other states and territories to develop a national code based on the Queensland code. The presence of all these codes will let those who use animals know what the community expects of them.

The codes will be adopted by the new animal care and protection bill, which I intend to introduce into the parliament in the very near future. This will ensure that the codes have a recognised and prominent position in the legislation and will better ensure the welfare of animals in Queensland. These activities are budgeted for as part of the \$1.78 million animal welfare project in 2000-01, and similar allocations will be provided in 2001-02. I believe that, at the end of the day, the code the DPI is developing for use of animals in film and television is very timely. I believe it will be very well received by not only the film and television industries but also our animal welfare groups.

**Ms STONE:** At point 1 on page 1-30 of the MPS support for industry development is mentioned. In regard to the sugar industry, I was pleased to see the recent price projections by Queensland Sugar. Indeed, I note Queensland Sugar had forecast the 2001 season pool price in the range of \$330 to \$360 per tonne, which is up to \$100 per tonne more than the final 2000 season pool price. What is the DPI doing to enable the sugar industry to achieve its full potential?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the year 2000-01 the government, through the Department of Primary Industries, provided over \$5 million to the sugar industry to assist it to reposition itself for the future. This funding has been utilised in the following ways: to facilitate progression of a long-term industry strategy; to strengthen the capacity for change; to provide targeted funding of the \$3.8 million per year to specific BSES projects for innovative, strategic research and

development; and to provide a legislative framework that enables the industry to be self-reliant, sustainable and internationally competitive.

As minister I established the Sugar Industry Development Advisory Council, SIDAC, to assist the industry to develop and implement a strategic direction to achieve sustainable industry development outcomes. It is a week from today that SIDAC will be meeting again here in Brisbane. One result of SIDAC to date has been a series of regional workshops that engaged over 300 participants in discussions on the changes required for the future. DPI is focusing SIDAC on strategic matters. One of these is enhancing commercial returns to growers and millers flowing from product diversification, in contrast to the current single commodity focus.

The department is working with other departments and the sugar industry to encourage, support and develop ethanol, electricity cogeneration and other value-adding opportunities. The department is part of a major state government project to develop a new fuel ethanol industry from cane. It involves ethanol-blended fuel to be used in Q-Fleet vehicles from this year and for this fuel to be available for voluntary use by other motorists in Queensland. I think the Minister for Environment is currently using that blend, which is about 10 per cent, in his car. It will also provide leadership to consumers about ethanol as a renewable and environmentally friendly fuel alternative.

**Ms STONE:** I now refer you to point 1 on page 1-25 of the MPS. Can you please advise the committee on the function and role of the new Fishing Industry Development Council and how this body will assist in the future sustainable management of Queensland fisheries?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The role of FIDC is to provide strategic advice on key issues impacting upon all aspects of the fishing industry and aquaculture development in Queensland. Some of the specific functions of FIDC are to oversee the development and implementation of the Fisheries 2010 vision for the industry; develop strategic policy to guide the future development of fisheries resources; provide strategic advice on the delivery of fishery management plans, including the operations of management advisory committees; and set strategic priorities and directions for research and development for the fishing and aquaculture industries.

FIDC is chaired by Ms Linda Lavarch MP, the member for Kurwongbah, and is comprised of very high-level representatives from all relevant stakeholder groups, which include the commercial fishing and marketing sectors, the recreational fishing and tackle sectors, and the chartered fishing and aquaculture sectors. It also has conservation, local government and trade union representation. This expanded representation is in recognition of the important links between the fishing industry and regional development and employment in coastal communities in Queensland.

FIDC had its first meeting on 24 May 2001 and it established the following subcommittees to assist in advising me on matters of significance to the future development of all sectors of the fishing industry: a research and development subcommittee, a market chain subcommittee, and a regional development and tourism subcommittee. The research and development subcommittee will play a vital role in the sustainability of the fishing and aquaculture industries by providing me with strategic advice on future research and development priorities in Queensland. In this regard, the R&D subcommittee will be holding a workshop in November this year to develop the Queensland fisheries research and development strategy for 2002 to 2012. This strategy will give priority to the

management information required to demonstrate that Queensland's fisheries are being managed ecologically and sustainably.

The market chain subcommittee will focus its attention on improving the market opportunities for Queensland seafood products, with particular emphasis on value adding within existing market chains, and better utilisation of by-products. The regional development and tourism subcommittee will be providing me with strategic advice in relation to regional development opportunities in commercial and recreational fisheries and aquaculture.

The council has also requested a review be undertaken of the strategic fisheries policy needs of both government and industry. The policy needs identified in this review will form the basis of discussion at the next meeting, scheduled for August 2001. Importantly, the council has advised me that the management and protection of fisheries habitat has been identified as its highest priority.

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

**Mr ROWELL:** Minister, can you tell us quite clearly what DPI is going to pay to Treasury in interest for the east coast trawl plan?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is a little complicated.

**Mr ROWELL:** Can you take it on notice?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** No, we will not take it on notice. It all depends on the term of the loan. I will get Terry to respond to that.

**Mr JOHNSTON:** If the loan goes the full term it will be \$1.5 million. We have not finally concluded the terms of the agreement, but we would anticipate that if the loan were repaid earlier it would be a lesser amount. It is between zero and \$1.5 million.

**Mr ROWELL:** So it is unknown but it will depend on the term?

**Mr JOHNSTON:** Like most loans, I guess.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** If you pay it off earlier, you pay less interest. It is as simple as that.

**Mr JOHNSTON:** We will be aiming to pay it off earlier if we can.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay, good. In your reply to an opposition question on notice No. 266—and this goes back to 30 May—maybe I can provide you with a copy of that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I get quite a few questions on notice, as you know, Marc.

**Mr ROWELL:** You notice, do you?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes.

**Mr ROWELL:** This is it. On 30 May you stated that operational efficiency savings within the market access and development output have been made in such areas as business systems, labour costs, vehicle use, travel and administrative support services. Presumably the same sort of operational efficiency savings have been made in other outputs. What were the saving measures introduced, and how much has been saved?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Dr Warren Hoey will respond to that.

**Dr HOEY:** The operational efficiency savings that I would expect any executive director, general manager or manager to implement, to me is good management, and you would appreciate that.

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, sure.



**Dr HOEY:** We aim to get best value for money, and we have to continually ask ourselves: are we doing that?

**Mr ROWELL:** Can you put a dollar term on it? That is what I am asking.

**Dr HOEY:** That is a very complex question, because the question itself is quite broad. I am not sure what level the honourable member wants to go to. But as long as I have been in the DPI and associated with management—well over 15 years—that has been a continual challenge for all managers to try to do that. So if I need to get back to you on some detail, I think I would need to seek some clarification of what level of detail. Because if you went to a fine level of detail, then it would be an almost impossible task for me to do. If you asked for a corporate response—in other words, from my perspective what I would be seeking—then I could do some work to provide that. But let me say that that has been an ongoing challenge for as many years as I have been associated with DPI.

**Mr ROWELL:** The question was asked and you have provided a response. If it is the broad brush in the major areas where you have had some savings, that will suffice on notice.

**Dr HOEY:** Okay.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** But let us just go back to your question on notice No. 8. We have had considerable savings in reducing our work with consultancies and advertising. We have made considerable savings there. And it is areas such as those that we are looking at maximising our savings to assist us to overcome some of the pressures that we have with the east coast trawl management plan.

I had better correct an answer on the interest on the east coast trawl. I think I said \$1.5 million, but Pauline has corrected me. The maximum would be \$1.65 million rather than \$1.5 million. So it is a maximum of \$1.65 million.

But at the end of the day, I want to say it one more time: if it was not for Senator Robert Hill, we would not be sitting here in this room talking about the east coast trawl management plan.

**Mr ROWELL:** I want to ask a question about the Rural Market Development Unit. I am referring to the market access and development output, page 1-14 of the MPS. Can the minister inform the committee what the total budget and staffing levels in the Rural Market Development Unit were last year and what has been allocated in the year 2001-02?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** So it is market development on page 1-14?

**Mr ROWELL:** It is not listed there, but there is a Rural Market Development Unit, is there not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Dr White, would you like to respond to that?

**Dr WHITE:** In terms of the overall expenditure for that particular chunk of the department, a subset of that is associated with the rural market development group, which I look after. I can go through briefly with you in relation to the funding for this year and the following years. The budget for 2000-01 was \$1.147 million for this particular section that we are talking about, and the estimated budget for 2001-02 is \$4.470 million. That is the group that specifically looks after—it is divided into marketing and economics and value chains. So there are three subsections within the rural market development group. So if you look at the actual trade issues that have occupied a fair bit of interest in the last hour or so, that is about \$1.8 million. So that comes down to a proportional part of the rural market development group.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Are you happy with that?

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, that is fine. That has given me an understanding. Page 1-30 refers to your department's implementation of the government's policy in regard to the sale of the Brisbane Markets. For the government to have made the decision to sell them, you would have provided cabinet with an estimated financial statement for 2000-01. Will you provide the committee with the most up-to-date financial statement of the Brisbane Market Corporation? Will you provide the current position regarding the value of the market assets, current liabilities, cash reserves, investments and total equity of the Brisbane Markets? And what direct benefit will the horticultural industry receive from the sale of the Brisbane Markets when they are sold?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes, you are right. In April of this year the government did decide to sell the Brisbane Markets, and the sale of the markets would be conducted under an open, competitive and fully transparent process. The process for the sale of the Brisbane Markets is being managed by Queensland Treasury.

**Mr ROWELL:** I understand that. But until they are sold, I presume they are still under your jurisdiction.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** What I would suggest is that the Treasurer is the minister who is responsible for the sale of the Brisbane Market Corporation.

**Mr ROWELL:** But they are under your jurisdiction until they are sold—or not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I would suggest that, in relation to the sale of the Brisbane Markets, you direct the question to the Treasurer.

**Mr ROWELL:** Are they under your jurisdiction right at this present time, or not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The sale of the Brisbane Markets is under the jurisdiction of the Treasurer, and I would suggest you direct -

**Mr ROWELL:** I will repeat the question. Are the markets under your jurisdiction at this present time, or not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is under the Treasurer. So I would suggest you redirect your question to the Treasurer.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay. The operating deficit for the Market Access and Development Unit of \$1.55 million in 2000-01 and the projected operating deficit in 2001-02 of \$724,000 has been attributed in part to additional costs relating to the papaya fruit fly outbreak. Minister, I refer you to the last year's MPS, which states in note 1 on page 1-16 that activities associated with the papaya fruit fly eradication program were completed in 1999-2000. What are the additional costs that DPI is still incurring? Is it possible to surmise that the deficit is, at least in part, attributed to the output of \$227,000 contributed to the east coast trawl plan?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me just start by saying that the operating deficit is largely due to continuing services for industry built during the papaya fruit fly outbreak which no longer have Commonwealth or any other state support; a larger than expected state government component of the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program's operational costs due to the two outbreaks of tuberculosis during the year—

**Mr ROWELL:** But with the east coast trawl plan, are you finished as far as the financial support that is necessary for that plan—because it has been raised?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let me just conclude this, and then I will get Kevin Dunn to respond. We have also had enterprise bargaining costs for staff undertaking fee-for-

service activities without increases in revenue. We have had various emergency responses to pest and disease incursions, as you would know—the red imported fire ant, black sigatoka, and so on. We have had reduced revenue within our chemical residues laboratory and increasing costs of quality assurance status within laboratories without flow-on changes to pricing service. So the 2001-02 operating deficit is largely due to our continued additional costs relating to services developed during the papaya fruit fly outbreak, enterprise bargaining and increased costs of quality assurance status within laboratories without increases in revenue. Kevin, would you like to add to that?

**Mr DUNN:** In respect of the honourable member's question on the papaya fruit fly carryover, that principally relates to the interstate certification assurance system, which was introduced and funded under the papaya fruit fly program. That is an ongoing program which has been extended to horticultural growers throughout Queensland. There had been an anticipated increase in revenue based on user charges for the year 2000-01, and that did not materialise. And that is, in fact, the reference that relates to papaya fruit fly as far as the deficit goes.

**Mr ROWELL:** Why did that occur, can you tell me very briefly? Because it is quite important that I understand why the user charges that you are talking about were not realised.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is right. We did not realise the user charges, and it does not appear that they will be realising those user charges again in the following year.

**Mr ROWELL:** Okay. My next question is: in the 2000-01 output summary last year, you projected your department would receive \$25.5 million in user charges. But in your answer to my question on notice No. 5 you stated that your department actually received \$30.9 million. Much of this increase was received through market access and development output, which is on page 1-17 of the 2001-02 MPS. From what activities was this additional \$5.5 million sourced?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You are on page 1-17?

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes. And we are referring back—

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You are referring back to?

**Mr ROWELL:** Page 1-7 last year.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** So you are looking at about \$5 million?

**Mr ROWELL:** \$5.5 million, yes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The short answer to you is that we have had two outbreaks of tuberculosis in Queensland, and we are part of the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. I would suggest that the majority of that money would be due to moneys that are being made available through the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. What have we budgeted this year? About \$8 million?

**Mr DUNN:** The Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program is responsible for a significant injection of funds through the revenue generated due to increased cattle sales with the destocking of properties associated with that program, and that is captured under user charges. The program's estimated budget was \$8.6 million.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes, it is about \$8 million; that is right.

**Mr ROWELL:** Referring to the 2001-02 output statement, user charges and market access and development output are expected to return \$9.656 million this year, up from a budgeted return of \$5.863 million last year. In your answer to my

question on notice No. 5 you refused to provide me with the details of any fee-for-service activities to be introduced this year. From which source do you envisage raising this additional \$3.8 million? And I ask you again: what new fee-for-service activities are to be introduced this year?

<sup>011</sup> **Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is once again to do with the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. Again, it is explained—

**Mr ROWELL:** Say, for instance, you are going to implement that. The finances for tick inspections, is that going to be part of what you are proposing to do?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Tick inspections?

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, there was some talk—

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There is nothing at all in relation to tick inspections.

**Mr ROWELL:** You were going to put it off into the councils and so on. Is that going to happen? No, it is not?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** There is nothing like that built into these estimates—nothing at all.

**Mr ROWELL:** Where is the \$3.8 million going to come from?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is explained in note one and in note four. It is basically due to the higher than anticipated number of incidents occurring under the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. Note four, once again, relates to the TFAP, which is the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program, and Safe Food activities are referred to in note one.

**Mr ROWELL:** Have you got page 1-7? Is that the page that you are looking at?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We are looking at page 1-17.

**Mr ROWELL:** Page 1-17 is market access development. I am looking at the output summary on page 1-7, where you have user charges referred to, and you have got \$9.656 million. Last year it was \$5.863 million. That is a \$3.8 million difference.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** You are better off going to 1-17. It is far more detailed there.

**Mr ROWELL:** But I was going back to the previous budget. That is the point that I am making. Those figures that you have in your previous budget and this one relate to the same thing. It all relates to the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program.

**Mr ROWELL:** The \$5,863 million?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We have budgeted around about \$8.6 million this year for the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. If you have a look at Van Rook Station, that is quite a substantial amount of money that is being expended there.

**Mr ROWELL:** So the \$3.8 million additional charge is all going into the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program. Is that what you are saying?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The bulk of that money is going into the Tuberculosis Freedom Assurance Program.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Have you got one more question?

**Mr ROWELL:** Yes, I have. I would just like to ask a question on FarmBis. which is very important to the state. Can you explain why \$2.16 million—and now I am going to page 2-8 of the MPS—from the first round of FarmBis funding has been carried over to this financial year? Is this due to the delays in paying producers grants under the scheme for the training that they have previously undertaken?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** In the first instance, let me just reiterate the point that you have made. FarmBis is a very important program for our rural communities. That is why our government has increased funding for FarmBis from \$22 million—we have increased funding jointly with the federal government from a total package of \$22 million over FarmBis 1 to \$30 million in FarmBis 2. We believe as a government that FarmBis is very important for our rural sector. Basically that is why the government has committed itself to increasing our funding in FarmBis. FarmBis 2 will be no different from FarmBis 1. It will continue to provide subsidies to our primary producers but we are also going to—and this basically goes back to the question that Howard asked previously—allow FarmBis to be used by our commercial fishers and also our roo shooters. They will be able to access FarmBis as well. There is a new category that is going to be involved in FarmBis, as well as land managers. So land managers, basically, do not have to be primary producers but I think that we all know the types of work that our land managers do. So we are expanding our FarmBis program to take in other areas of our primary production areas. As far as the finer detail of the answer, I will ask Colin Holden from the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority to add to that. This is in relation to the carryover funds.

**Mr HOLDEN:** Your assumption in terms of a carryover of funds is quite correct. The process is that applications have come in during this past financial year, that is, 2000-01. Approvals have been given for those particular applications and in many, many instances the training is undertaken into the future.

**Mr ROWELL:** One way or another you have got to find \$15 million for the next three years, too.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Don't you worry about that.

**Mr ROWELL:** Don't you worry about that. Someone will lose out somewhere, that is for certain.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** No.

**Mr HOLDEN:** This is still funding that has been allocated under the original agreement and we have until the end of December this year to finalise that training and with each approval, the producer—

**Mr ROWELL:** Minister, the \$15 million that has to be found for the future?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is there.

**Mr ROWELL:** It is there? Don't you worry about that.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Etched in gold, ready to be accessed. It is going to be provided in exactly the same manner as FarmBis.

**Mr ROWELL:** But QRAA has to find the money.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is no different from FarmBis 1. It is no different from the method that we used to finance FarmBis 1. FarmBis 2 is undergoing the same process of accessing funds.

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

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Do you have any more questions?

**Mr ROWELL:** Do I have any more questions? Yes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Let's talk about them later on.

**Ms NOLAN:** On page 1-10, dot point 2 of the 2001-02 MPS you mention developing our aquaculture industry. Can you describe how the DPI is assisting Queensland's aquaculture industry to grow and to prosper?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The aquaculture industry in Queensland experienced its largest growth in recent years, as I have said previously, with total production valued at \$56.3 million in 1999-2000, which was 30 per cent higher than the \$43 million in 1998-99. It now contributes one-quarter of all the fish caught or farmed in Queensland. Marine prawns are the prime mover in aquaculture growth and have risen to \$35 million in 1999-2000, with a further \$10.2 million from karuma prawns, which are exported live to Japan. The reason why we are able to export karuma prawns live to Japan is the research that was done through the Agency for Food and Fibre Sciences to allow for packaging of these prawns in a certain way so that they arrive in Japan live. Of course, they command a huge premium, which is around about \$180 per kilogram landed in Japan.

In 1999-2000 the aquaculture industry provided 441 direct full-time jobs. Casual employment provided the equivalent of a further 119 full-time positions, giving a total of 592 full-time equivalent direct jobs in aquaculture. Two major initiatives have been put in place to support an all-government approach to aquaculture development. Firstly, as Minister for Primary Industries, I have established the Queensland Food and Fibre Sciences Innovation Council, to which we referred earlier. This council, of course, identifies and promotes issues and areas within primary industries that benefit from the application of new approaches in technologies, and aquaculture is a keen target industry. Secondly, there is an interdepartmental committee for aquaculture chaired by—shall I mention his name—Mr Bob McCarthy, Deputy Director-General of the Department of State Development, which was established following a cabinet decision in November 2000 to support the further development of aquaculture.

The interdepartmental committee will target four key areas, which are client services for aquaculture investors, streamlining state government assessment and approval processes and procedures, developing an all-of-government aquaculture industry development policy, and improving Commonwealth-state intergovernment protocols for assessment and approval of aquaculture projects. So in other words we are looking at a one-stop shop to try to accelerate aquaculture proposals so that they can get off the ground.

Our department is investing more than \$6 million in leading edge R&D over three years—in your electorate, Marc—to support commercial aquaculture of high-valued seafood such as tropical rock lobster, reef fish, mud crabs, scallops and soft shell crabs. Our department is working with commercial partners under the state government's new Collaborative Industry Venture program to use world-first technology to develop a sustainable, competitive soft shell crab industry in Queensland. Our researchers have also now developed a soft shell Moreton Bay bug, which is quite tasty when cooked the right way. Our department is also working in partnership with Australia's largest marine products company, M. G. Kallis, to develop a viable farming system for the highly prized tropical rock lobster. We are also focusing on environmental management issues, particularly effluent reduction. We are also researching recirculation and bioremediation techniques such as constructed mangrove wetlands and vacuuming-cleaning table fish such as mullet. I do not know whether you have seen some of the media stories on mullet, but mullet is a very interesting fish. It can clean up waterways and it can clean up mosquito

lava, which reduces mosquito population. For those of you who have not tried mullet, I highly recommend it to you as a very good eating fish.

**Ms MALE:** I refer you to page 1-23, paragraph four of the 2001-02 MPS. Can you explain what your department is doing to protect areas vital to the long-term sustainability of Queensland's fisheries?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The government is certainly maintaining its ongoing program of managing our existing declared fish habitat areas and investigating further coastal systems for further possible future declarations. Currently, more than 750,000 hectares of tidal and intertidal fish habitats have been declared under the Fisheries Act 1994. The fish habitat areas are gazetted over key habitats along the east coast of Queensland and the Gulf of Carpentaria. Clarification and revision of existing fish habitat area boundaries are ongoing and provide for additional, small land areas to be declared, thereby expanding the extent of fish habitats protected. FHAS—that is the acronym that is being used—proposed for gazettal by late 2001 include Baffle Creek, which is near Bundaberg; the Annan River, Cooktown; and Kirke-Love Rivers, western Cape York. Natural Heritage Trust funds have been obtained for the investigation and gazettal of the Elliott River at Bundaberg, and the Margaret and Starcke Rivers in eastern Cape York as well. Separately, the government is funding the investigation and gazettal of the Edgecombe Bay fish habitats at Bowen. Initial investigation of the Fitzroy River delta and the northern most section of The Narrows at Gladstone has also been commenced. In addition, four fish habitat codes of practice have been developed jointly with key stakeholders such as local governments, the sugar industry and our electricity suppliers. The four codes provide for agreed best management practices that allow for works to be undertaken by stakeholders whilst minimising impacts on fish habitats. The codes are linked to fish habitat approvals under the Fisheries Act 1994. The permits are very broad in their coverage, for example council wide, and replace multiple individual work-site based permits granted for 12 months. Strategic permits are granted for three years to link with strategic works programs and reduce the level of bureaucracy for the stakeholder as well as government. Peter Neville, you have missed out to, haven't you?

**Mr NEVILLE:** Yes, I have.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The codified permit system allows for greater monitoring of works and reduced impacts on fish habitats. There are also training workshops being undertaken with local government and electricity staff and with cane growers to ensure an understanding of fish habitat values and the intent of the codes of practice. Further codes of practice are proposed with other key stakeholders such as Main Roads, Queensland Transport, Telstra and the aquaculture industry. All in all, things are looking pretty rosy for our fish habitat areas in Queensland.

<sup>012</sup> **Ms STONE:** Minister, I would like to ask a question in relation to the important role women play in our primary industry sector. I refer the minister to page 1-19, dot point 6, of the 2001-02 MPS. What is your department doing to continue to advance the recognition and involvement, the skills and development, and leadership opportunities for women in the primary industries sector in Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Whilst women have always played a critical role in Queensland's primary industries, sadly, at times their input and their expertise go unrewarded. Statistics indicate that in Queensland we have the lowest number of women on rural boards and committees in Australia. Women also bring skills and strengths that are critical during stress and crisis, an asset that Queensland agriculture cannot afford to overlook. To promote change, our department is working

closely with industry groups to create a more balanced rural sector by encouraging more women to become involved in leadership roles. Our DPI's Women in Rural Industries Unit demonstrates the department's commitment to making opportunities available for women, particularly in leadership roles. This unit hosted a women and leadership forum in June to address the issues preventing rural women from taking on leadership roles. Carolyn, did you attend that one?

**Ms MALE:** Yes.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The forum brought together women from a variety of rural industries, the public sector and universities. Rural youth were also represented. Topics discussed included the opportunities facing rural women, the barriers preventing them from becoming involved and the benefits of including women in decision-making processes. The outcomes covered a range of strategies, including developing a list of industry mentors and champions to work with women in the agricultural sector.

As Minister, I also chair a Ministerial Advisory Committee for Women in Agriculture and Resource Management, consisting of industry and public sector representatives. Members report on the strategies and activities they are undertaking to encourage the greater participation of women and young people. Just recently, I announced a \$25,000 scholarship program that the government is funding, which offers up to 25 rural women \$1,000 each to attend the company director's course. The course provides skills and experience for effective board membership. I challenge our rural industry groups to match that funding dollar-for-dollar.

Our department's support of the annual Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation's Rural Women's Awards assists in raising the profile of rural women and their valuable contribution to the sustainability of our agricultural sector. The unit provides policy advice and financial support to a range of industry organisations, assisting them to develop strategies and programs that will encourage the involvement of women. The unit also plays a key role in helping to establish a number of women's industry groups, such as the Women and Dairy Advisory Group, the Queensland women's seafood industry network and women in horticulture.

In the past three years, we have certainly gone a long way to try to address many of the wrongs that have been inflicted on our rural women in Queensland. With the help of the changing face of primary industries as seen at the committee table here, I am quite sure that there will be quite useful mentoring going on between people of the committee and also our women in rural industries.

**Ms NOLAN:** Before I go on, Minister, you should know that there is a film out called *Mullet* about a bloke who fishes for mullet. You would love it.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** How long ago?

**Ms NOLAN:** It is currently on.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** At the Dendy?

**Ms NOLAN:** Yes. The customers do not like the choice of mullet, but perhaps you could encourage a sequel where everybody is won over to his taste.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That the poor humble mullet is featured in a movie is good to see.

**Ms NOLAN:** I refer to page 1-19, point 8, of the 2001-02 MPS. Why has the government allocated \$3 million over three years for the Burdekin catchment area?



**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The Burdekin catchment is a significant catchment in Queensland. It is one of our four major catchments to be included in the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. The Burdekin catchment provides the opportunity for us to build on the state's investment in resource management through this national plan and demonstrates that ecologically sustainable development is achieved by supporting viable enterprises and vibrant communities, as well as through valuing our resources.

We indeed have made a commitment of \$3 million over three years. This commitment will put in place practical on-ground activities that will implement research findings and planning outcomes that can demonstrate a positive impact on the long-term sustainability of the Burdekin catchment.

What does this mean? It means that this initiative, which is called the Burdekin Rangelands-Reef Initiative, is there to do three things. In the first instance, it is there to help our producers in the Dalrymple Shire to control their woody weeds and to help them reduce the use of chemicals.

**Mr ROWELL:** Hymenachne?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Yes, my word. As part of that program, the government has given a check for \$250,000 to the Burdekin Shire Council to purchase an aquatic weed harvester, which was trialled at Payard's Lagoon towards the end of last year. It certainly cleaned that lagoon so well that bird life has now returned and fish are going to be introduced shortly. It will become a place where families can go and have a picnic, throw a line in and be guaranteed to catch a fish—not a mullet—within an hour.

All in all, we are cleaning up the lagoons, helping our producers in the Dalrymple Shire to eradicate their woody weeds and reduce the use of chemicals, which will improve the quality of the Burdekin River and, finally, reduce the chemical discharge that goes into the Great Barrier Reef. Honestly, I believe it is a great program. It has come up from the community. The community approached our DPI officers at Charters Towers to put something like this in place. We have put it in place. I would like to see other agencies become involved in this program.

Last week I have had discussions with Minister Wells, and he wants the EPA to become involved in this program as well. We would certainly accept them. More importantly, let the federal government have a good look at the program. If the program works, and I believe it will, it could become the model for catchments in other areas of Australia. It would be good to see the federal government match our funding dollar-for-dollar.

**Ms MALE:** I refer to the second last dot point on page 19 of the 2001-02 MPS. Can you detail what the department is doing to assist indigenous communities throughout Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I believe that issue has been dealt with pretty thoroughly by Jan Stone from the Office of Rural Communities. To save the time of the committee, I might leave it with the answer that Jan gave earlier and go onto another question.

**Ms MALE:** Okay.

**Ms STONE:** I refer to page 1-19, dot point 4, of the MPS. How does the Rural Partnership's team foster economic development in Queensland's regions?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** The department, through the Rural Partnership initiative, is successfully fostering a community-driven approach to managing the changes generated by an increasingly integrated and competitive global economy. I have

already answered this question as well in response to another answer. I think I have responded adequately to the question previously. If we could go to something else?

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Glass House would like to ask a quick question.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** How much longer do we have?

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have two minutes.

**Ms MALE:** I refer to page 1-30, dot point 6, of the 2001-02 MPS. What is your department doing to assist the further expansion of private forestry in Queensland?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** It is good to see a question on forestry being asked today. Obviously coming from the member for Glass House, it is certainly pretty dear to her heart —

**Ms MALE:** It certainly is.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:**—especially with her involvement in forestry in her area, as Ron Beck would know from her representations over the past five months since she has been the member. I believe that our government has been very successful in encouraging the establishment of private plantations in Queensland. Since 1996, more than \$25,000 new hectares have already been added to our plantation estate, much of this in the private sector.

The government has seen its role as one of encouragement and facilitation. It has done it this way: we have committed to spending \$18 million over five years under the south-east Queensland forest agreement in the establishment of 5,000 hectares of hardwood plantations aimed at building the long-rotation sawlog resource. We have also committed to spend \$8 million over the same period on hardwood timber research and extension to develop the hardwood plantation industry. We are also removing legislative impediments and we are using incentives such as the rebate on stamp duty on commercial hardwood plantation arrangements. The rate of planting will further accelerate a successful silviculture and financial returns are demonstrated.

Since 1996, three regional plantation committees have been established in Queensland in a partnership between the Commonwealth and the state governments. The most recent is in central Queensland where \$75,000 of state funds were contributed for the period to 30 December 2002. I think that money was given to Bill Ludwig, the Mayor of Livingstone Shire. Do not you worry about that.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That ends the government questions. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

**Mr ROWELL:** On page 1-3 there is reference to the \$6 million aquaculture development in Innisfail, far-north Queensland. The President of the Aquaculture Prawn Farming Association, Mr Col Price, in a press release, described this fund as being poorly targeted and said that it has missed opportunities to create real jobs in rural and regional Queensland. Can the minister explain what the reference to Innisfail really means? Is any of this expenditure capital expenditure? What is this initiative actually about?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** As I indicated earlier, the government sees aquaculture as the growth industry in Queensland. We are currently going through the process of streamlining the application process through an interdepartmental working group, as I mentioned earlier. Is the member referring to our \$6 million investment over three years around Innisfail to promote aquaculture? It is \$2 million over three years.

**Mr ROWELL:** It says that more than \$6 million over three years will be dedicated to applying leading-edge research and development. It talks about Innisfail and north Queensland. Is there a Public Works component in it?

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Who is the person who is criticising this?

**Mr ROWELL:** He is the chairman of the Australian Prawn Farmers Association.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I am sorry, I have not—

**Mr ROWELL:** It is a press release and he says that the fund is poorly targeted and has missed opportunities to create real jobs in regional Queensland.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We have the Queensland Food and Fibre Science Innovation Council headed by Dr Joe Baker. We have experts in aquaculture, including very respected people from within the academic sphere, who advised the government.

**Mr ROWELL:** This is the industry.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** This is part and parcel of the government's program to promote aquaculture. I mentioned previously that under the components of that program, I think we were looking at the rock lobsters, soft shell mud crabs and so on.

**Mr ROWELL:** That is right.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** We are locating the research facilities up around Innisfail area. Peter Neville, would you like to add to that, or John Pollock?

<sup>013</sup> **Dr GRIEVE:** I would like to respond and just give some background to the actual programs in which that \$6.1 million is going to be applied and maybe answer some of the issues in relation to the concern of the prawn growers. The aquaculture industry development initiative is aiming to apply leading edge R&D for now and for the future to the delivery of ecologically sustainable aquaculture technologies. This initiative will be implemented through four programs, and these include sustainable water use and remediation of discharge. This is particularly important to the prawn farming industry in terms of looking at remediation strategies and also—

**Mr ROWELL:** Minister, I think what the industry is saying is that you are not working enough with it on these types of issues. They would not have put a press release out—

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I refute that assertion.

**Mr ROWELL:** It says the \$6.1 million is poorly targeted.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is one person. I think you will find—

**Mr ROWELL:** Here is the letter. This person is the chairperson of the Australian Prawn Farmers Association.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I think you will find that at the end of the day the Department of Primary Industries is working very closely with industry. We have partnerships with industry and I just cannot understand why—

**Mr ROWELL:** Why put out a press release like that? Can I give you the press release? It is important that you do read it.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** I do not want to dwell on what one person says.

**Mr ROWELL:** It is the industry—the Australian prawn farmers.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I ask the member to cease interjecting and let the minister continue.

**Mr ROWELL:** That is okay. I just wanted to make the point.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** That is okay.

**Mr ROWELL:** It is important for the DPI.

**Mr PALASZCZUK:** Once again I will refute the allegation of whoever is making it. I stand behind the close cooperation that the Department of Primary Industries researchers and aquaculture have with industry. I believe that that partnership is being fostered and that you will see that partnership basically continue in our \$6 million investment in aquaculture in far-north Queensland, including the Innisfail area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates in the area of Primary Industries and Rural Communities has expired. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. Before they leave, I remind them that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard Internet quick access web site within two hours from now. The hearing is now suspended for a changeover and a break. The hearing will resume at 12 noon for the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services.

Sitting suspended from 11.47 a.m. to 12.00 p.m.

**FAMILIES, ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY AND DISABILITY SERVICES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. J. C. Spence, Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services

**Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy**

Ms A. Dutney, A/Director-General

Mr N. Lawson, A/Executive Director

Mr R. Loos, Manager, Service Strategy

**Disability Services Queensland**

Ms A. Dutney, A/Director-General

Ms L. Wherrett, Executive Director

Mr C. Callioni, Director, Finance and Administration

Mr R. Loos, Manager, Service Strategy

Mr B. Elder, A/Director, Business Support

**Department of Families**

Mr F. Peach, Director-General

Mr P. Ross, Deputy Director-General

Mr A. David, Executive Director, Children, Families and Young People Directorate

Mr S. Armitage, Executive Director, Youth Justice Directorate

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<sup>013</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** Good afternoon everybody. I would like to introduce our committee members: Stuart Copeland, the member for Cunningham; Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego, who is taking the place of Dorothy Pratt, the member for Nanango, who is ill today. On the government side there is Julie Attwood, the member for Mount Ommaney as chair; Barbara Stone, the member for Springwood; Carolyn Male, the member for Glass House; and Rachel Nolan, the member for Ipswich.

The hearings of Estimates Committee G are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services. The time allotted is four and a half hours. The committee proposes to consider in the first hour the proposed expenditure for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. Following lunch, the committee will consider the proposed expenditure for Disability Services Queensland followed by the Department of Families.

I remind members of the committee and ministers that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the

end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers is to be allotted to non-government members and any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. In accordance with the sessional orders, a member who is not a committee member may, with the committee's leave, ask a minister questions. In this regard the committee has agreed that it will automatically grant leave to any non-government member—and Vaughan Johnson, the member for Gregory, is here for this purpose—who wishes to question a minister unless an objection is raised at the time by a member of the committee.

I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that Hansard can record this information. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off or into silent mode. In accordance with the sessional orders, the committee has resolved that the minister be permitted to make two three-minute opening statements in lieu of one five-minute statement if she so wishes—one statement at the commencement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander component and one statement at the commencement of the Families component. I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Minister for Disability Services to be open for examination. The question before the chair is—  
That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you would like to make a brief introductory statement, the committee asks that you limit it to three minutes.

**Ms SPENCE:** I would like to introduce the people at the table with me today. On my right is Ms Anne Dutney, who is the acting Director-General of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and also Disability Services Queensland. On my left is Mr Neil Lawson, who is the acting Executive Director of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, and on the far left is Mr Cesare Callioni, Director of Finance and Administration, Department of Families. The Department of Families provides financial service to DATSIP.

In the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, in its second term the Beattie government is committed to maintaining and increasing support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. We are committed to developing and implementing policies and practices that improve the lives of indigenous peoples in this state. Firstly, I would provide a brief profile of indigenous people in Queensland. Almost 30 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia live in Queensland. Indigenous Queenslanders represent about three per cent of the total Queensland population, but ABS statistics estimate that by the year 2006 we will have the highest number of indigenous peoples residing in Queensland than in any other state or territory.

Twenty per cent of our indigenous Queenslanders live in the very remote areas of the state with limited access to services. Forty per cent of our indigenous people are 15 years or under, compared with 22 per cent of the non-indigenous population. Almost three per cent of the indigenous population is 65 years or over, compared with 11 per cent of the non-indigenous population. Life expectancy of indigenous people nationally is almost 20 years below that of the non-indigenous population.

It is quite obvious to this government, as it has been to the indigenous community, that many of the policies and practices of the past have not worked or have not worked well enough. The Beattie government has, therefore, made an offer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of Queensland to join the government and, in partnership, find solutions to addressing the current disadvantage.

The budget for the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy rises to \$107.4 million in 2001-02, an increase of 17.9 per cent. The budget reaffirms the government's commitment to make recompense for the non-payment of award wages by Queensland governments between 1975 and 1986. In addition, \$7 million in funding is budgeted for the community expansion plans project, which provides serviced housing allotments for seven indigenous communities, and \$6.2 million over four years for continued operations and maintenance of water related infrastructure in the Torres Strait region. The 2001-02 state budget also provides \$15.3 million over three years for stage 2 of the Torres Strait major infrastructure program. This funding is matched by the Commonwealth. So over \$30 million will be available in stage 2 of the MIP.

Last financial year saw some new initiatives undertaken in this portfolio, including an offer to negotiate a 10-year partnership between the government and indigenous Queenslanders, a commitment to the reduction of indigenous people in custody by 50 per cent by the year 2011 as outlined in the justice agreement and setting aside for the first time funds for economic development initiatives in deed of grant in trust communities. As a result of negotiations to date on the 10-year partnership, negotiation tables have been established in four communities: Doomadgee, Sarina, St George and the Torres Strait. In relation to the justice agreement, we are the only government in the country to commit to a target to reduce the number of indigenous peoples in prison by 50 per cent by the year 2011.

In 2000-01, I earmarked \$500,000 for economic development initiatives in DOGIT communities. I am happy to say that we have been able to assist economic development initiatives in a number of communities including New Mapoon, Injinoo, Palm Island, Cherbourg and Woorabinda. As a result of this work last year, I have earmarked \$1 million for economic development this year.

Our other achievements in the last year include releasing in December *The Next Step*, the Queensland government response to the report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence; paying more than 3,000 indigenous people \$7,000 each for discrimination; in collaboration with the Department of Housing completing negotiations with the Commonwealth on the mainland housing infrastructure bilateral agreement; completed feasibility studies for the community expansion plans to provide service allotments in seven DOGIT communities; and, in partnership with the Department of Natural Resources and Mines, completed the water supply dam on Palm Island and completed planning for a purpose-built diversionary centre in Cairns. We recognise that the government alone will not be able to address indigenous disadvantage. We believe that, in partnership with the community, we will go a long way towards achieving the agreed targets we negotiate as part of the 10-year partnership.

In the debate on the amendments to the community services legislation last month, the Deputy Leader of the National Party and member for Gregory said he was prepared to work with the government on indigenous issues. I find this very encouraging and ask all non-government members to work with the government

and the community to achieve positive outcomes towards addressing indigenous disadvantage. Madam Chair, I look forward to questions from the committee.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first part of questioning belongs to non-government members.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I note from page 2-9 of the MPS related to the output performance of the strategic policy advice provided by DATSIP that no mention is made of the kupai omasker project. I understand that this project is handled by the Law and Justice Policy Branch within the strategic policy directorate of DATSIP. I note that in relation to my first question on notice as to when and how extensively was the kupai omasker discussion paper released, and you have replied that the discussion paper was released at the ninth national Torres Strait Islander conference in October 1999. Is it not true that this discussion paper was simply left on a table at this conference with no proper distribution of the discussion paper taking place?

**Ms SPENCE:** There are a number of parts to that question. As the member for Gregory states, the Law and Justice Branch of DATSIP has done considerable work over the last few years in the area of kupai omasker. In fact, I was the minister who began initiating government work on this very important issue to Torres Strait Islanders. Before I became the minister, I understand that this had not been on the government's agenda. I began talking to Torres Strait Islander people about the issue and realised how important it was for them. We allocated policy workers in the department to begin some initial project work. As a result of their work, I took a submission to cabinet and the government released a discussion paper on kupai omasker.

As the member for Gregory rightly states, this went to a very important conference of Torres Strait Islander people. I do not agree with his assessment that this was just left on the table. From the briefs I received from the department at the time—and I think we are talking about well over a year ago when that conference was held—it was certainly a subject for debate at that conference. Subsequently, that discussion paper has been released to the Torres Strait Islander community in Queensland.

I believe that the issues surrounding kupai omasker are important and, as a government, I have given a commitment that we would like to legislate about the practice of kupai omasker, but no-one should be under the illusion that this is easy. This would be groundbreaking stuff for Australia. No other state or, indeed, the Commonwealth has attempted to legislate to put in practice traditional customs such as kupai omasker. I believe the department has done some very good work on this issue, but more needs to be done. That is why I have asked the Attorney-General and the Premier to refer this issue to the Law Reform Commission.

I understand that the Attorney-General has been in intense discussions with the Law Reform Commission and they are looking at ways to take up this issue. I think that their advice is going to be crucial to the government to formulate proper legislation in this area. It crosses a number of department and legal issues, and that is why I think we need a broad legal framework before we attempt to legislate for the practice of kupai omasker. No-one should be under any doubt of my commitment to ensure that we find a way through the legal maze that kupai omasker presents to all of us. There are legal issues and there are ethical issues that we really need to give time and consideration to.



**Mr JOHNSON:** Given that the kupai omasker is a sacred and taboo subject central to Torres Strait Islander culture, is not the lack of a proper formal release of the discussion paper an extremely disrespectful and dismissive treatment of such a culturally sensitive practice? Given that you maintain that the kupai omasker discussion paper was released in October 1999, are you able to table what responses your department has received from the Torres Strait community following the release of that discussion paper in question?

**Ms SPENCE:** I just have to ask a question. I am not sure that we have formal responses. If you hang on a minute I will get someone to the table. I am advised that extensive consultations have occurred in recent years and informal consultations have occurred since the cabinet decision involving a number of stakeholders. These stakeholders have included the kupai omasker working party, other government agencies, members of the Island Coordinating Council, the Torres Strait Island Regional Authority, the Community Justice Group of Thursday Island and Mura Kosker.

<sup>014</sup> There have been discussions with representatives from the community in Townsville relating to the mainland experience of kupai omasker, which obviously differs from the experience in the Torres Strait. These consultations have further highlighted the legal, administrative and cultural complexities of kupai omasker. It has therefore been decided as a result of those consultations that possibly draft legislation needs to be sought from the Law Reform Commission. From that brief, I would say to you that we do not have formal consultation to release for public benefit at this stage.

**Mr JOHNSON:** So you will further pursue that consultation with the working party?

**Ms SPENCE:** I would expect that when the Queensland Law Reform Commission starts debating this issue it will also undertake its own round of consultations to advise it of these issues. We are, as I said, looking at the terms of reference and the time frame for its inquiry into this matter.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Can you name all the members of the Kupai Omasker Working Party? Can you tell the committee who those people are?

**Ms SPENCE:** I hope so, but I do not know them off the top of my head. We do not have that list in front of us, but we will certainly get it to you before the end of these proceedings.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Thank you, Minister. In paragraph (b) of your answer to my first question on notice you state that \$30,000 was allocated to the kupai omasker project in 2000-01 and that, of that total, only \$20,334 was spent. Why has the balance of this allocation not been spent on the advancement of this project, which is so important to the Torres Strait Islanders?

**Ms SPENCE:** With the allocation of an amount such as that for consultation, that of course did not include the cost of the services of the officers who are specifically directed to work on this project. That consultation was really to put together the discussion paper and ensure that that discussion paper was distributed throughout Queensland. I am advised that that has occurred. I have just listed the number of agencies that the department has engaged in consultation with about this matter. It is a normal practice when we set aside an amount such as \$30,000 that we might be a few thousand dollars short in our consultation. Frankly, I am not too worried about that. That is a normal practice in government.

**Mr JOHNSON:** When did the Townsville consultation take place? Was it in 1997 before the release of the discussion paper?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not have the date for the Townsville consultation. That might be a bit difficult to get before the end of today's proceedings, but we will certainly get that to you in the next 24 hours. There was a lot of consultation with the Torres Strait Islander community before we put out the discussion paper. In fact, I did a lot of consultation myself before the release of that discussion paper and before I took the submission to cabinet. I have been out there talking to Torres Strait Islander people throughout Queensland, as you would imagine, about this issue, as has the department.

**Mr JOHNSON:** You have received confirmation from the Attorney-General that kupai omasker has actually been referred to the Queensland Law Reform Commission, and you made mention of that. If you have a copy of that referral—and I do not know whether you do or do not—can you table it? You have been unable to provide any kind of meaningful commitment to kupai omasker. I know you said that there had been consultation, but at the end of the day we want to know how committed you are to the implementation of this program. Your discussions with the Queensland Law Reform Commission represent a Pontius Pilate action on your behalf, I believe. The Family Court has had a practice direction in place since 1999 recognising kupai omasker for the purpose of making parenting orders. Would you like to comment on that further?

**Ms SPENCE:** Firstly, I would like to dispute your comment that I have failed to display a meaningful commitment to kupai omasker. I believe that in my answers today I have already stated on the record that I am very committed to ensuring that traditional adoption practices be recognised in Queensland. As I have said, though, this is not easy. This is not something we can do overnight. I doubt that many people in this room would understand kupai omasker. It is a very difficult subject. As I said, it involves an enormous number of ethical and legal issues. I am committed to finding a way through this very difficult problem. It will be a great test of this government and a great achievement of this government to be able to legislate meaningfully to recognise kupai omasker practices in this state. It will be groundbreaking legislation for the whole of the country, but we are not going to walk away from the difficulties that are involved here. That is why I have asked the Attorney-General to refer it to the Law Reform Commission for consideration.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I think the important thing to remember here, as I said in my question, is that the Family Court has had a practice direction in place since 1999 recognising kupai omasker for the purpose of making parenting orders. If the Family Court can do this and you have the constitutional power and are in government, surely it is a state responsibility, not a Commonwealth responsibility, to fast-track the process.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think you have to understand that kupai omasker is not about parenting orders. It is about adoption. The Family Court can make parenting orders and we can give custody of children under the department and the Children's Services Act, too. But what the Torres Strait Islander people want is the formal recognition of their adoption practices. Kupai omasker is not, as I read in the paper this morning, about giving a child to other members of the family because a parent has died. Kupai omasker is much more than that. It is about children being given up at birth to other family members or indeed non-family members without the consent of the state. That practice is occurring and has traditionally occurred. That is not the

way adoption is undertaken in Queensland or indeed any other part of Australia. So you are asking for a whole different framework in the way that we see adoption.

**Mr JOHNSON:** My own family had an experience when my mother and father adopted two of my cousins because their parents died when they were little, and my parents reared them with us. There is no difference between that and kupai omasker. There already exists sufficient power under the Adoption of Children Act 1964 to recognise kupai omasker, as you rightly said, as a special needs case. If the people of the Torres Strait want to adopt this practice, it must be a terrific saving to government and a great thing as far as these people are concerned. You said at the start that you intend to work in a bipartisan way for the betterment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and I reiterate that. That is exactly the purpose of my line of questioning here today. Hopefully we can achieve that.

**Ms SPENCE:** I agree. If a parent dies and a child is available for adoption, then under the present adoption laws we would be more than willing—and it would be likely—to give that child to another family member. So that is easy. That can happen under the current adoption laws. Kupai omasker is much more than that. It enters the whole area of surrogacy, because women in the Torres Strait become pregnant for the sole purpose of giving up that baby to another family or non-family member. We are entering into the whole realm of surrogacy when looking at kupai omasker. I have talked to women who have done this. Plans are made years ahead, or they might become pregnant and have a child for older people in the communities.

I have talked to people in their 50s and 60s who have taken babies from other family members because they have been childless. So we are entering into this realm of what we might see as surrogacy. It is a very broad practice. It is practised incredibly differently in the Torres Strait. In some areas of the Torres Strait it is not such a big issue because the child and the family acknowledge that the child has been given by another family and they become part of that extended family. In other areas it is a very secretive practice and the new parents do not tell the child of their adoption. They pretend to be real parents.

The practices are not uniform and are not easy. That is why we are looking at so many ethical issues. We do not allow surrogacy in this state or country, but some of the practices of kupai omasker border on the field of surrogacy. While I have time left in answering this question, I now have the membership of the working party. It includes Steve Mam, McRose Elu, Dana Ober, Bill Lowah, Francis Tapim and Ivy Trevallion.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer to the recent four-month secondment of DATSIP executive director Kerrie Tim to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet where she has taken up a position as the acting executive director of the Office of Women's Policy. Is it envisaged that Ms Tim will return to her substantive position in DATSIP following the conclusion of the secondment? Was Ms Tim's removal from the position of executive director of DATSIP in any way influenced by the receipt of petitions or motions of no confidence in Ms Tim from indigenous staff of the department or from indigenous communities?

**Ms SPENCE:** Ms Tim voluntarily took up a secondment to become the director of the Office of Women's Policy for four months. It will be up to her whether she returns to DATSIP or takes some other position in the Public Service. I am not prepared to say any more on that particular issue.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Performance bonuses paid to senior bureaucrats has been a topic of relevance in recent estimates hearings. I note that the Auditor-General has

finally been successful in convincing the Premier that not all aspects of accountability can be covered up and that details of these bonuses are to be made public. At the salary rate of SES 3, Ms Tim's salary package would range between \$129,000 and \$150,000. Will you table Ms Tim's performance review documentation since taking up the position of executive director of DATSIP?

**Ms SPENCE:** Performance bonuses and chief executive contracts are not matters for individual ministers. They are matters for the Premier. I would suggest that that question would have been better directed to the Premier.

**Mr JOHNSON:** At this point in time, as you are well aware, the estimates for the Premier's Department are long over. Would you be able to follow that through with the Premier's office in relation to the figures contained in that question?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the Premier has made a statement that he would not be releasing the details of performance bonus payments made to chief executive officers, and he has outlined his reasons for doing so.

**Mr JOHNSON:** So I take it that that would also be avoided under FOI.

**Ms SPENCE:** That is right.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Accountability is a dirty word, isn't it?

**Ms SPENCE:** That is a matter that the Premier talked about extensively with your leader, I understand, in the estimates process. You might refer to the *Hansard* for that issue.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer to my second question on notice. I notice in your answer that you failed to acknowledge the equal lowest level performance in the implementation of risk management strategies to assist grant scheme administrators relating to accountability requirements. This is recommendation No. 3 from the Auditor-General. In your answer, you state that the Auditor-General's report was released seven months ago, and that is your second correct answer so far. When will DATSIP's risk management framework be completed? Can you assure me that in December 2001 DATSIP will not be ranked last in the implementation of these recommendations, bearing in mind that you have had seven months to act on these recommendations since the report was handed down?

**Ms SPENCE:** As to the monitoring and performance assessment strategies, the department is moving to enhance its existing processes. I might hand that question over to the acting director-general, who has had a hands-on role in taking on this particular challenge in her first four months in the job. We believe that we certainly need to improve our grants process. I will let Ms Dutney talk about that.

<sup>015</sup> **Ms DUTNEY:** With regard to the grants administration and associated accountability requirements, controlled and risk management strategies, DATSIP has addressed the Auditor-General's comments, made just seven months ago, by undertaking a review of the grants program. It examined administrative and other issues related to improving performance. The review also addressed some of the value for money considerations, increasingly incorporating risk analysis into the assessment of the grants request and forming audit and risk management committees to apply risk management strategies to the department.

As to monitoring and performance assessment strategies, the department is moving to enhance its existing assessment processes, which also look at services delivered compared with predetermined criteria. This enhancement will include some mid-year evaluation of performance by grant recipients against some of the program objectives.

Acquittal of grants has improved. Certainly further improvements will be made in the coming year. Similarly, greater attention is being paid to the recovery of certain funds. Vigilance by staff has meant that some funds from the unused earlier releases have been received back into the department and others are being examined.

Building on the work done in recent months, including some stronger internal departmental processes and appropriate structures, DATSIP will continue to improve its performance in the area of grants administration. It is certainly one of the key priorities for the current board of management to examine. It examined a paper very recently on our improvement strategies for the forthcoming year. Certainly senior staff have been dedicated to reviewing particular tasks, which will contribute over the next few months to even further improvements in that area.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The portion of time allocated to non-government members has expired. I call the member for Glass House.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, page 2-10 of the MPS outlines the release of the government's response, *The Next Step*, to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence report. Can you outline what progress has been made by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy towards addressing the report's recommendations? What efforts will be made to continue to address the recommendations in 2001-02?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think the recent national debate about family violence certainly serves to highlight the fact that the community and the media, and indeed the government of Queensland, are far ahead of other states and territories when it comes to publicly discussing these issues. We have seen this debate go on now for more than 18 months, since I tabled the report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, a report which I, along with those women, initiated in this state. Indeed, it was a ground-breaking report which made 123 recommendations towards addressing the issues of violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The recommendations covered a number of areas which included state, and indeed Commonwealth, responsibilities.

The state government in Queensland has made two responses to this particular report. In May 2000 we released *The First Step*, which was a comprehensive audit of the government's programs and services, addressing each of the recommendations of the women's task force report, for which the state government was responsible. We have yet to see the federal government take such an action. In December 2000 the Queensland government response to the task force report *The Next Step* was released. It represents the government's commitment to implementing the recommendations of the task force report.

As I said earlier, we have also signed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice agreement. This agreement sets a target of reducing the number of indigenous people in our prisons by 50 per cent by 2011. We believe by attacking the causes of indigenous overrepresentation in prisons we will also be attacking some of the causes of family violence. *The Next Step* demonstrates a whole-of-government approach to addressing recommendations of the task force report.

These are not initiatives that can be neatly packaged as fail-safe solutions and sold to the media as sound bites. Family violence demands concerted responses from across government, and many of the initiatives do not fall within the responsibility of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. However, the department is working closely with other agencies, such as the Liquor

Licensing Division and the Queensland Police Service, on strategies to combat sly grog and to transfer responsibilities of community police to the Queensland Police Service.

DATSIP is now working on plans for an indigenous family violence forum, which will be organised in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board. In the next year we will also coordinate government initiatives in addressing the four priorities articulated in *The Next Step* through the 10-year partnership family violence working group. We will do much more. It is difficult to talk about such a big issue in a three-minute time frame.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, I note that you spoke briefly in your opening statement about economic development projects. I refer you to page 2-14 of the MPS, which outlines economic development projects. It alludes to aquaculture and marine projects in Mapoon, Injinoo and Palm Island. Can you outline what aquaculture and marine projects are being developed in these communities?

**Ms SPENCE:** I place enormous importance on economic development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a means of creating real jobs. I think it is an important way of addressing real indigenous disadvantage in this state. That is why for the first time last year we allocated half a million dollars to economic development just in the DOGIT communities. That is why this year we are allocating \$1 million for that purpose.

We have been working hard in the last year, and the member inquires about some very good examples of what can be achieved with collaborative work. The projects are the integrated silviculture and aquaculture project in Injinoo and New Mapoon. On this project DATSIP worked with the Department of Primary Industries and liaised with those two communities to progress potential economic development. One of the potential projects identified was an integrated system in which planted strands of mangroves and other salt tolerant high-value hardwood species provided a habitat for high-cultured species such as mud crabs. It was envisaged that the system would allow for the farming of mud crabs and selective logging of high-value timbers, such as mangroves and melaleucas.

A feasibility study was conducted with input from the DPI, DATSIP, community councils and traditional owners. The feasibility study identified that appropriate conditions existed in the northern peninsula area. It was then determined that a pilot project should be commenced over a 20-month period on the two sites. Analysis of potential markets was undertaken and established that sufficient markets exist, both domestically and internationally. As part of the pilot project it is proposed that the Department of State Development will assist in the development of a detailed business and marketing plan. I have committed \$70,000 for the employment of a project manager for the pilot project.

In the area of the sponge aquaculture project, we learned that research by the Australian Institute of Marine Science identified the waters off Palm Island as highly suitable for establishing an open ocean aquaculture farm to grow sea sponges. AIMS researchers indicated that opportunities exist to farm sea sponges for sale for cosmetic and industrial use. AIMS also identified the potential of the sponges to produce high-value chemical compounds that have various pharmaceutical and chemical applications, including some anti-cancer properties. AIMS has already contributed substantial research to the development of this project.

**Ms NOLAN:** On page 2-14 of the MPS it is stated that feasibility studies have been completed to provide serviced blocks for housing development in seven

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities under the Community Expansion Program. Can you outline the outcomes of these studies?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is estimated that at least 144 serviced allotments will be developed under this program. The seven communities identified as being of the highest priority in need of serviced allotments are Aurukun, which will get 27 lots; Badu Island, which will have 19 lots; Bamaga, which will have 13 lots; Kowanyama, which will have 19 lots; Mer Island, which will have 13 lots; Palm Island, which will have 23 lots; and Yarrabah, which will have 30 lots. Final lot numbers will be determined when accurate cost estimates are determined, prior to construction.

Consultation has been undertaken with ATSIC, the ACC, the ICC, the TSRA, the departments of Housing, Health, and Natural Resources and Mining and local councils. Site development will include design documentation and construction of roads, allotments and water and sewerage infrastructure. This development will commence the Department of Housing's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing five-year capital works program as well as ATSIC's current national Aboriginal health strategy program of works.

Total housing allotments required by the seven communities to 2004 is 287, at an estimated cost of \$17 million. In order to ensure equitable distribution of the limited available funds of \$7 million, each of the seven communities was allocated a proportion of the funding corresponding to their identified lot requirements as a percentage of the total lots required.

In the last financial year expenditure has been approximately \$250,000 on planning and design reports for the seven communities and \$150,000 on minor works associated with the development of the proposed subdivisions on Badu and Mer Islands. In 2001-02, funding for the three Torres Strait Islander communities of Badu, Bamaga and Mer will be under the umbrella of stage 2 of the Torres Strait Major Infrastructure Program. Stage 2 of the MIP is a joint Commonwealth-state funded infrastructure program that will deliver over \$30 million of infrastructure to the region over the next three years.

From 2001 to 2003, funding for the Aboriginal communities is as follows. It will be distributed between Aurukun, Kowanyama, Palm Island and Yarrabah. Negotiations have commenced with ATSIC to jointly manage this project under ATSIC's current national Aboriginal health strategy, in accordance with the principles of the housing and infrastructure bilateral agreement, with approximately \$1.4 million to be expended during 2001-02. So all in all, \$3.651 million will be expended in 2001-02 across the seven communities. This is a very important example of the close collaboration that the Queensland state government has developed with ATSIC over these infrastructure issues.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, in response to a question from the member for Springwood you mentioned a number of aquaculture and marine projects in some deed of grant in trust communities. I note that page 2-14 of the MPS outlines further economic development projects in Cherbourg and Woorabinda. Could you firstly outline what these projects are and secondly outline what social and economic benefits are expected to be derived from these projects?

**Ms SPENCE:** The project in Cherbourg refers to the upgrade of the export abattoir, and the Woorabinda project allows the Woorabinda Pastoral Company to progress key business initiatives. The Cherbourg Aboriginal council operates a mixed species abattoir, set up initially to process emu from the Cherbourg emu farm. However, due to the decline in demand for emu products, a feasibility study

directed towards improvement of the abattoir was undertaken by the Department of State Development, in collaboration with the community and DATSIP. A sound business opportunity based on the processing of goat meat was identified for the abattoir.

DATSIP and DSD have supported the Cherbourg Community Council to set up a restructured business, the Cherbourg Food Processing Company, upgrading existing plant, and have focused the organisation towards commercial operations. DATSIP and DSD have contributed \$150,000 each towards the upgrade of the plant. DATSIP has also provided an additional \$300,000 to the Cherbourg council to assist towards the legal costs of the restructured process.

A condition of the grant was that at least three members of the board, including the chair, have appropriate industry experience. In recent months I have been out to Cherbourg and had a look at this abattoir. I am very impressed at the upgrades that have been undertaken there and at the business acumen of the Cherbourg community and those who are operating the abattoir. They have sought and been able to include some good financial and industrial people on their board. I am hoping that this will be a real success story, not only for the people of Cherbourg but indeed for the whole Queensland community.

In terms of the Woorabinda Pastoral Company, I have approved a grant of \$117,545 to enable it to progress key business development initiatives for its pastoral and farming operations. In particular, it will allow the company to increase its capacity to generate profit and in turn provide additional employment in the region. Woorabinda is one of the very few DOGITs to establish and maintain a profitable business activity over several years. This has had a very significant motivational impact on that community and, I believe, has gone a long way to improving the social situation at Woorabinda.

The company has identified a number of priorities for the development in the next year or so, and these have been costed at approximately \$310,000. They want to purchase a submersible pump, piping and tanks to gravity feed troughs through the property's Stony Creek and increase the cattle carrying capacity of that property. They want to pull brigalow regrowth and seed with buffel grass—and I am glad the member for Gregory is here, because he probably understands all this—to enable increases in the cattle herd size. They have a number of good initiatives on hand, and we are pleased to support them.

<sup>016</sup> **Ms STONE:** Minister, I move to page 2-19 of the MPS, which refers to the Island Industries Board, or IBIS as it is commonly known. I am aware that the government allocated \$12 million in 1998-99 for the upgrade of the IBIS stores. Can the minister outline progress on the stores upgrade program and how the people of the Torres Strait can expect to benefit from these upgrades?

**Ms SPENCE:** Up to this point in time we have spent over \$3.3 million on the upgrade of these stores. We call it an upgrade, but it is really a reconstruction of these stores. Most of them are being replaced. The current status of the construction of the new IBIS stores is the Rosehill and Tamwoy on Thursday Island has been completed and is fully operational; on Darnley Island we completed the new store in July of this year; on Boigu Island, Saibai Island and Murray Island, construction commenced in July this year, and work is expected to be completed in October this year; on Kubin and St Pauls communities on Moa and Yam Island, construction will commence in October this year; on Warraber Island and Coconut Island construction will commence in December this year. The new IBIS stores for the



remaining island communities of Dauan, Yorke, Mabuiag and Stephen will be negotiated in the next year.

Construction of new IBIS stores on all outer island communities are subject to the outcome of negotiation of 10-year leases between IBIS and the island communities and the traditional owners. Q-Build is managing the construction of these new stores in consultation with island councils, and I am pleased to say that Q-Build is focused on maximising local employment and training. The Queensland government's guidelines for all its buildings to meet the Art Built In requirements will also benefit local artists by having their work displayed in the stores.

I have not been up to the Torres Strait as yet to see any of these new stores, but I am due up there for a week in October, when I will be having a look at the new stores and officially opening them. But I understand that people in the communities are already benefiting from the new stores, as is IBIS, as the new stores are providing a much wider range of quality goods and services, healthy and nutritious foods to promote good health and the wellbeing of Torres Strait Islander residents. And they have improved access to goods and services by the availability of quality fresh produce. They are now able to maintain fresh produce and reduce costs associated with damaged and spoiled foods. As well as the employment and training opportunities that have been available in the construction of the stores, there is long-term employment with retailing and ongoing repair and maintenance of these new stores that is offered to local Torres Strait Islander people.

**Ms NOLAN:** In a question on notice for the estimates process, you discussed infrastructure projects being delivered to remote Aboriginal communities. Can you identify specific infrastructure projects that will be commenced in particular Aboriginal communities in the next year?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. Previously I mentioned the community expansion program, with \$1.376 million being allocated to serviced housing allotments at Aurukun, Kowanyama, Palm Island and Yarrabah. We have also allocated \$2.61 million to a sewerage upgrade at Wujal Wujal community. As members may be aware, the Wujal Wujal community is located in the World Heritage listed Daintree area, and for many years sewage has been discharging into the Bloomfield River, which in turn flows into the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The existing septic tanks also cause a number of environmental health problems for the community in this tropical climate. The upgrade of the sewerage facility will not only improve the environmental health of the community but also protect the World Heritage area. Of the original \$18.5 million provided by this government over four years in 1999, just over \$5 million remains to be allocated. These funds will be allocated shortly on a needs-based priority to various communities.

Recent infrastructure projects completed in Aboriginal communities include the Palm Island dam at a cost of \$26 million; the Palm Island sewerage effluent treatment at half a million dollars; a Palm Island housing subdivision, which cost \$854,000; the Palm Island waste transfer station at \$957,000; the Lockhart River sewerage treatment upgrade at \$1.8million; the Doomadgee sewerage upgrade of \$650,000; the Hope Vale water treatment of \$3 million; the northern peninsula area water/sewerage stage 2 treatment of \$6 million; and Yarrabah sewerage upgrade of \$1.6 million.

I think it is important that we talk about these issues and what we are doing in terms of improving infrastructure, particularly water and sewerage, in these remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I think the rest of Queensland

has no idea of the enormous costs and the amount of money—taxpayers' money—that is going to improve the infrastructure—the basic health infrastructure—in these communities. It is sad that, at the end of the day, you go to these communities where we have spent millions and millions of dollars on this basic infrastructure, but you do not visibly see a great change to the community. But I think we all have to understand how important this sewerage and health infrastructure is to these communities.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, page 2-9 of the MPS mentions the reduction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in jail by 50 per cent by 2011. This target is contained in the justice agreement signed in December 2000. In view of some seven months having elapsed since the agreement was signed, can the minister outline what her department has done or is doing to ensure that the target is achieved?

**Ms SPENCE:** Since signing the justice agreement in December we have worked collaboratively across government and with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Board to coordinate the implementation of the agreement. I think a lot of hard work is going to have to be done by future Queensland governments to reach that target of a reduction of 50 per cent by the year 2011. The work has been undertaken at two levels, the broad macro level planning required to effectively coordinate implementation of the agreement and implementing the DATSIP commitments contained in the action plan of last year.

For example, in relation to the action plan, DATSIP has progressed the development of a cross-cultural awareness training program for delivery to members of the judiciary. That will occur in the latter half of this year. We have continued to support diversionary centres and cell visitor services to police watch-houses under the Diversion From Custody Program. We have seen in this year's budget a huge increase to our funding for local justice groups. We are now, I think, this year funding them to the tune of \$1.8 million. We are working collaboratively with Crime Prevention Queensland in the development of Yaldilda, a strong crime prevention resource which the Premier and I launched last Sunday up in Ayr. So there is much work being done at both the macro and the micro level to ensure that we indeed meet the very challenging target that we have set ourselves.

The justice agreement acknowledges in its guiding principle the need for direct community involvement in the development and delivery of justice policies and programs in order to achieve this reduction. We know that government programs are not in themselves going to achieve this reduction. We need the support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to reduce the incidence of crime and the number of people being sentenced in the formal criminal justice system. That is why we put so much work and consultation into negotiations for the justice agreement. This is not just a target set by the Queensland government. This is a target that has been agreed to by indigenous Queenslanders, and I think we all understand that it is not going to be attained unless we have the support and commitment of indigenous Queenslanders to get us to that figure.

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

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, pages 2-10 and 2-11 of the MPS refer to family violence. Given that the indigenous women's task force report on family violence, the Robertson report, was released in December 1999, and given the level of frustration within indigenous communities at the lack of action on the part of the Beattie government in relation to this issue—of particular interest here are the

statements of Mr Bertie Button, chairperson of the Goolburri regional council in the *South Burnett Times* on 3 July 2001—

The State Government has shown minimal interest in family violence issues apart from reacting to media headlines. Its Minister for Aboriginal and Islander Affairs, Judy Spence—

has been ineffective in this area. That is his comment. I am just quoting there. Minister, what activities, other than holding one cross-government workshop to identify current and future strategies, have been undertaken by DATSIP to action the Robertson report since its release in December 2000? And given that Mr Button states that he was brushed aside when he met with you in March last year, what communities consultation processes have been conducted thus far to action the recommendations of the Robertson report?

**Ms SPENCE:** I assume the comments by Mr Bertie Button—and quite frankly, I think he has no credibility at all on the issues of family violence. He has been invited to sit at a number of consultations that DATSIP has undertaken with the Cherbourg community in the last year to plan more strategies in that community to address the issues of family violence. He has not sat down at the table at one of those consultation meetings.

There is a very successful men's family violence group operating at Cherbourg. I am told that Mr Button is not a member of that group, nor has he ever attended or shown any enthusiasm for the activities of that group. I have to say that I have been to the Cherbourg community on a number of occasions. I have met with the women at the women's shelter there and, indeed, I have spent a night at that women's shelter. There are some terrific people in Cherbourg. It is probably, I suspect, the longest running women's domestic violence shelter in an Aboriginal community in this state, and they have a lot of expertise there. They have a lot to teach us.

I suspect the Cherbourg community is probably doing more to address family violence than any other indigenous community in this state. So let me say that for the record. But Mr Button has not been involved in any of that. Mr Button is a member of ATSIC. ATSIC claim that they have employed a number of family violence workers for the first time themselves in the south-west area of Queensland. Unfortunately, on a number of occasions when the department has asked them for the names and the locations of these workers so that we can start working collaboratively with them—because there is no point in us all doing our own thing out there—they have been unable to provide those names or locations. Indeed, I know a lot of Aboriginal people in that part of the world are also asking where these workers are.

I would say to Mr Button that he is out there alone on making those criticisms, and I make the offer to him and to ATSIC that we need to work together on this issue of family violence. Point scoring, which he seems to want to indulge in, is not going to benefit anyone. So I am making the offer to him via you today to sit down with me and work sensibly and, indeed, to work with his own community on these issues.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, will you please explain why you will not discuss the issue of no confidence in Kerrie Tim given that she is paid by the taxpayer?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have no knowledge of any no-confidence motions in Kerrie Tim. I do not know where that is coming from. I would suggest that, if that is the case, this is not an appropriate forum to discuss those kinds of personal issues. This is a forum to discuss the budget and the performance of the department. I do not want to get involved in Public Service personality issues here today.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, in your opening remarks you made reference to a package of \$6.4 million for water infrastructure. You have touched on some of the issues here today in relation to government questions. And bearing in mind the problems that the Bidunggu people have been confronted with in recent times, in that \$6.4 million package, and as you are well aware—and myself being a representative of remote communities; and when you talk about remote communities you talk double everything else in costs when capital works programs are done—will you be putting monitoring strategies in place for the capital works programs in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that we get fair value for the dollar and that these people are not being ripped off?

<sup>017</sup> **Ms SPENCE:** Yes, we certainly do put a lot of monitoring strategies in place to ensure that we are getting value for dollars. My department basically uses Q-Build as project managers for the infrastructure projects in the Torres Strait and we are working in close collaboration with the TSRA to help us deliver those water and other infrastructure projects. I have to say that I think that the TSRA are a very professional organisation and they keep a close eye on the accountability themselves. So I think that collaboratively the state and the TSRA are monitoring the progress and ensuring accountability, employment, training and projects are delivered on time and on cost. We have been very successful in the past few years—more successful, I suspect, than some government agencies—in ensuring that we have accountability.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. Before they leave, I remind them that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard Internet quick access web site within two hours from now. The hearing is now suspended for lunch. The hearing will resume at 2 p.m. with the consideration of the proposed expenditure for Disability Services Queensland.

Sitting suspended from 1.01 p.m. to 2.00 p.m.

<sup>017A</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** Good afternoon everyone. The hearing of Estimates Committee G has now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Disability Services. I remind the minister and officials that the time limit for questions is one minute and the answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allotted to non-government members and any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that Hansard can record this information. Please also ensure that all mobile phones and pagers are switched off.

Minister, if you would like to make a brief introductory statement for this portfolio area, the committee asks that you limit it to three minutes.

**Ms SPENCE:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I would like to begin by introducing the team out the front with me. On my right is Anne Dutney, the acting Director-General of Disability Services and DATSIP. On my left is Libby Wherrett, the Executive

Services Director of DSQ; Cesare Callioni, the Director of Finance; and Russell Loos, the Manager of our Service Strategy Team.

It has given me great satisfaction in the past five months to be the Minister for Disability Services in the second term of the Beattie government. Before I talk about our achievements and our plans, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many people in the disabilities sector who have welcomed me into this role. They have shown by their cooperative spirit that they are more than willing to continue building on the partnership with government that began to flourish during our first term. I would also like to extend my thanks to the staff of the Department of Disability Services Queensland for their advice and assistance.

The sector is acutely aware that a government that is committed to improvement in the lives of people with a disability is essential to a civil society. In Queensland, people with a disability, their families and support networks lived for far too long in a vacuum of government assistance. I tip my hat to these people who made do on little more than the smell of an oily rag for many decades. Having had some experience as Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, I have noticed some striking similarities between the past treatment of indigenous people and the past treatment of people with a disability. We are still making up for the historical neglect of the interests of the disability sector.

In 2000-01 the achievements of Disability Services Queensland were many. They included providing \$7.2 million to support 297 adults through individualised adult life support packages, providing \$3.7 million to support families who care for a child with a disability—and this included 44 families through the Family Support Program, nine new family support and respite services and enhancements to 12 existing respite services—injecting \$1.5 million to enhance the capacity of communities to be more inclusive and supportive of people with a disability; establishing eight local area coordinators in rural Queensland; and reallocating another 20 people from the Basil Stafford Centre to community life. Statistics aside, the people who I meet through correspondence and in person leave me in no doubt that a significant level of unmet needs remains. I acknowledge that we have some way to go in eroding this unmet need in Queensland. We have made a good start for the second term with our election commitments building on the foundation of reform. It has been my privilege as the minister to strive to surpass those commitments. Already we have exceeded our pledge for the first year of this second term. The 2001-02 Disability Services Queensland budget is 11.6 per cent larger than last year's budget. The \$304.1 million allocation includes an additional \$31 million in recurrent funding.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you. Non-government members will commence with their first block of questions and I call the member for Cunningham.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you, Minister, and a special thanks to your departmental staff who are attending today. My first question is regarding the design and the construction of the pedestrian bridge across the Brisbane River. Could you please advise whether or not you or your department were consulted on disability access for that bridge?

**Ms SPENCE:** My department was consulted. I am not sure of the level of detail on that one. I will have to pass that question over to Libby Wherrett, the executive director. I understand that consultation occurred on the bridge. I will take this question myself. During the design of the South Bank bridge, the South Bank Corporation consulted with a specialist consultant to meet the access needs of

people with a disability. The Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association of Queensland have been involved with the bridge since the beginning of consultation in October 1998. Detailed discussions were held with the Paraplegic and Quadriplegic Association during the July to September 1999 period and a number of design changes were incorporated as a result of these discussions.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet is establishing clear guidelines and protocols regarding the disability sector's involvement in planning for government construction projects. We believe that we have a strong partnership between the government and the disability sector. In terms of specific consultations with my department, I have to say that my brief does not mention the specific officers in DSQ who were consulted about this matter but I am happy to take that question on notice and get back to you with those details.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you, if you could. Just in relation to that, it is my understanding from what you just said that those organisations were consulted and consequently the redesign of the bridge occurred. Was that a correct understanding of what you just said?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, that is not my understanding at all. I understand that some consultations occurred during the specification phase of the bridge, but subsequent consultations occurred after that. Obviously, the government acknowledges that we have to do more in involving the disability sector in initial consultations and I think that is a lesson that we have all learned.

**Mr COPELAND:** Following on from that, given that on page 3-1 of the MPS, the very first dot point relates to the aims of Disability Services Queensland and why it was established, which was to ensure a coordinated and strategic approach to disability issues across government, and given that the department was consulted initially, was that advice given by the department regarding the design of that bridge incorrect, forcing the redesign of that bridge?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I would not say that at all, and I would not sit here and say—nor I am sure would any of my officers—that officers in DSQ are experts in construction. That is why we do not have construction teams. We do not have a building team in DSQ; they are more human services people. That is why we go to other associations as a government when we are looking for that more expert design. Certainly, we would see our role as in pointing other agencies to the correct agencies to consult and that is what we have done in this case.

**Mr COPELAND:** I assume, though, during that initial design that the appropriate standards were looked at and that the appropriate advice was not given or, if it was given, why wasn't it followed? I appreciate the detailed advice that you are going to get back to me on notice regarding what advice was given by your department.

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am happy to do that, but I think that your assumption is one that would be better put to the Minister for State Development, who has responsibility for the design and construction of that bridge. We do not have that responsibility. We are not a department of builders. In fact, although we have an extensive capital works budget, we work closely with other agencies in the delivery of that budget.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I am glad you mentioned the Minister for State Development, because in his remarks at estimates last Tuesday week—and I assume that you would have seen those—he advised that compliance with disability access had caused the blow-out in the costings for that footbridge. Have

you expressed your concern to him regarding that statement, especially given that this is Disability Access Week?

**Ms SPENCE:** Look, I think it is very clear and we have been very up front about this. Making the bridge properly accessible for all people with disabilities has added \$4.4 million to the cost of construction. But that would have occurred whether we had done that in the initial phase or done it later as we did. The \$4.4 million was always going to occur as an additional cost to that bridge. We do not walk away from that. There is an additional cost in making our public infrastructure disability accessible and we will continue to do that. We have learned the lessons of the past; we have learned the lessons from this bridge. Let us hope that we can improve our performance in the future. But there is always going to be a large cost involved in many cases in making buildings disability accessible. In fact, yesterday I was at Moorooka and opened a respite centre for the Cerebral Palsy League. They have just spent \$60,000 putting an internal lift into their centre. All over Queensland we are playing catch up in our government buildings—in our schools, in our neighbourhood centres and in our health-care centres—to make those buildings properly accessible. There is a cost involved. We are not embarrassed by that. We will find the money and we will do it.

**Mr COPELAND:** I would agree that the money is well worth spending to make sure that those areas are accessible but, as you said, the cost is especially expensive when you are retro-fitting those accesses. I think that any redesign of that bridge that has happened once construction has started has blown the cost of that project out far in excess of what it would have been had the initial advice and had the initial design been correct. Again, I look forward to receiving the advice on the question on notice.

There have been records that you have instructed your departmental staff to forward all correspondence concerning complaints to you personally for signing. Can I ask why you have put this process in place? Does this show a lack of confidence in the staff in your department to handle certainly basic complaints? Are you not concerned that this practice will cause delays in responding to correspondence?

**Ms SPENCE:** Just to answer the first part of your remark rather than question, I do not know whether you are an expert in construction and design, but my advice is—and I understand it is the advice that has been given to the Premier—that the \$4.4 million that we are spending to make sure that that bridge is accessible would have occurred whether, in fact, we had been given the advice correctly before we started or at some stage during the construction. That is the something that you can debate with the Minister for State Development. I do not know what credentials or advice you have to warrant your making that statement.

**Mr COPELAND:** Just on that, can I say—

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I have not finished. I have got three minutes. I do not think that we are going to have a whole hour and a half of you interrupting me. In terms of your question about complaints, I have given the advice to my staff and the department that any letter that is addressed to me as minister I will respond to. That is all. I have not given any advice that I will respond to all complaint letters that come to the department, but any letter that is addressed to me as the minister I will reply to. I do not want departmental staff replying to correspondence that is specifically addressed to me.

**Mr COPELAND:** I will answer the question that you just posed to me regarding my expertise. I am not an expert in construction, but I have had some experience in major capital projects. I know that whenever there is a change in design once construction has started, the increase in cost is significantly higher than it otherwise would have been should the initial design have been correct. That is the very real question with this particular project and with the advice that was taken on the initial design of that project. Following on from that, on page 3-3 of the MPS there is an allocation of \$12.7 million for the support of adults with a disability, with a significant focus on people with a disability who have ageing carers. That is much appreciated. Could you please advise what your government is doing for people with a disability whose only carer may be their child as opposed to ageing parents?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. We actually have very good news on this front. This year, we have given preference to exactly those kinds of carers whom you mention in your question in our allocations of adult lifestyle support funding. This is the first year that we have said that we are targeting specifically the support needs of the elderly, that is, people who have looked after their children for all their lives but are currently getting too old to undertake that capacity. The support that we will give them if they qualify in that high-need group will be accommodation support, assistance with such things as personal care and household management, community access, assistance with developing relationships and pursuing activities within the community, recreation, and assistance with developing and maintaining recreational and leisure interests.

Successful applicants will receive approval for an adult lifestyle support package within bands of support according to their level of need. These bands are for high support packages in the group from \$50,000 to \$90,000, medium support packages between \$20,000 and \$50,000, and low support packages that will be up to \$20,000.

**Mr COPELAND:** I have a more specific question regarding respite care for families. You mention on page 3-3 respite care for families with children with a disability. Going on from the answer that you have just given, what respite care is available for young children with disabled parents, both in terms of having a carer for the disabled parent and perhaps providing an opportunity for those children to have a break away from caring for their parents?

**Ms SPENCE:** Are you actually talking about children who care for parents?

**Mr COPELAND:** That is correct.

**Ms SPENCE:** We are developing a carers recognition act. This is a government election commitment. At the moment, we are actively consulting about the development of this legislation with other government stakeholders and the community.

The purpose of carers recognition legislation will be to recognise the vital and important role that carers undertake in our communities. Without the contribution of unpaid informal carers, we know that government resources would be stretched to an even greater extent. We know that carers are a diverse group, including those who care for the aged, children in foster care, people living with medical conditions, people with disabilities themselves and children caring for parents with a disability or medical condition.

In terms of respite services, yes, there is respite available. You are talking about the children themselves?



**Mr COPELAND:** It is actually twofold. One is respite care for the parent so that the child can get away, but also providing the opportunity for those children to get away. I know that in some other states there is the ability to attend camps and those sorts of things for children who are caring for a disabled parent.

**Ms SPENCE:** We fund a number of non-government agencies to undertake that kind of respite on behalf of the government. I have certainly talked to parents with disabilities whose children have attended those camps. We do not specifically run them as a government agency, but certainly in our funding agreements with the non-government groups, that is a component of many of the groups' funding.

**Mr COPELAND:** Could you advise where some of those groups are located?

**Ms SPENCE:** We are happy to take that question on notice. We can provide you with the agencies that we fund for that purpose. We believe we also have the information on the types of camps, where they are located and, indeed, other kinds of respite services.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you, Minister. On the output statement regarding support for adults on page 3-10 of the MPS, it is stated that there are 14,303 people receiving support. How many people are currently on a lifestyle support package?

**Ms SPENCE:** At present, there is close to 700 people on an adult lifestyle support package and it will go up to over 1,000 this year.

**Mr COPELAND:** Following on from that, how many applications does your department receive for those packages annually, for example? Of that number, how many are successful?

**Ms SPENCE:** There is close to 6,000 people on the register of need in Queensland. In fact, that number has increased by 28 per cent in the last year. We are expecting that that number will increase even more this year. Why does the number increase? Because we are out there actively advertising and promoting the register of need, as do the disability groups.

The 6,000 people who are currently on the register of need do not represent the proportion of the population who have a disability and some need. We know that 19 per cent of Australians have some disability, so one in five people in our community have some sort of disability and, undoubtedly, they have some type of need. We know that the 6,000 individuals who are currently on our register do not represent the unmet need out there in the community. This is not a secret. We publish our register of need. People know these statistics.

We manage to assist over 70 per cent of the people on the register of need. There are probably 30 per cent of the people on that register who are not getting some sort of support. However, I would say about the register of need that we are encouraging people to nominate on the register even if their need is not immediate. We are saying to families, 'If you are currently looking after a disabled child and you are not getting any support, but some time down the track you are going to see the need in your family for some support, then put your name on the register now and we can start assessing your situation.' Frankly, there is no list of people with a disability in Queensland. This is the government's first attempt to start compiling some sort of profile of people with a disability and their needs in our community.

**Mr COPELAND:** On page 3-14 of the MPS, the actual cost per child receiving support in 2000-01 is \$12,367, which is \$1,000 less than budgeted. Why is there a difference in the estimated budget and the actual?

**Ms SPENCE:** Can we ask the member for Cunningham to repeat the question?

**Mr COPELAND:** On page 3-14 of the MPS, the actual cost per child receiving support in 2000-01 was \$12,367, which is \$1,000 less than budgeted. Why the difference there between the estimated dollars and the actual?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will pass this question over to the Director of Finance, Cesare Callioni, for a response.

**Mr CALLIONI:** Generally, the state contribution went up by about \$1.2 million but, at the same time, the number of children receiving support went from 5,280 to 5,837. That calculation shows overall a decrease in the individual costs per child. It is just a mathematical calculation.

**Mr COPELAND:** Following on from that, why is the target for 2001-02 the same as the target for 2000-01 when it was \$1,000 less in that year?

**Ms DUTNEY:** One of the issues that we need to recognise is that, when we are funding, our approach is often highly individualised. There is no actual standard calculation per child. In terms of the numbers of children who receive support and the dollars allocated, that is done on a methodology so it can actually change from year to year, and that is very much the average.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for the first block of non-government questions has expired. I call the member for Glass House.

**Ms MALE:** The MPS at page 3-7 shows the total budget for Disability Services Queensland in 2001-02 will be \$304.068 million, excluding capital. How does this figure compare with the commitment made in the Labor Party's pre-election policy document *Building on the Foundations of Reform*?

**Ms SPENCE:** Labor made a commitment to increase funding for Disability Services by \$60.8 million over three years. The 2001-02 state budget does not simply deliver the first instalment of that commitment; it actually goes further.

The annual budget for DSQ has increased by \$31.6 million in output funding, an 11.6 per cent increase over the published budget. Add to that the \$2 million in capital funding and the total has increased by \$33.6 million. This clearly exceeds the amount of \$24.4 million committed in the election policy document *Building on the Foundations of Reform*.

As the election commitments noted, the major portion of new funding for disability this year, the \$18.2 million, is allocated according to the DSQ business plan. In addition, I have announced new funding of up to \$4.5 million for the Endeavour Foundation to assist the severe viability issues facing Queensland's largest non-government provider of accommodation support.

I have also announced funding of \$1.2 million as a state contribution towards supplementing or indexing recurrent grants paid to community organisations. I expect these funds to be matched by the Commonwealth to deliver a \$3.1 million increase overall.

I have also announced a \$2 million injection of capital funds which will be distributed this year for capital upgrades to community organisations and DSQ-provided services. Over the next two years, I will be taking submissions to cabinet that will seek additional funding to fulfil our election commitment over the three-year term.

**Ms STONE:** MPS page 3-3, paragraph 2, states that the 2001-02 budget includes an additional \$9 million, which is matched by Commonwealth funding. I know that you have previously aired concerns that the federal coalition government

may backslide on that commitment to retain recurrent funding increases to Australians with a disability. I ask the Minister: have you had an assurance that the federal government will not renege on this commitment?

**Ms SPENCE:** The short answer is no. I have written to Senator Amanda Vanstone, the federal minister, about the Commonwealth's intentions about funding beyond 30 June next year, but I have received no reply despite the fact that I wrote to her over two months ago to express my concerns. The date is significant because that is when the Commonwealth-state disability agreement is due to expire.

The Commonwealth gave us an assurance at a meeting in New Zealand in July last year that it would maintain current base funding levels under a third agreement. In good faith the states and territories took this to mean that a new agreement would begin on 1 July 2002 and that it would be providing funding of \$501.2 million per annum, which includes money to address the unmet need of people with a disability. Instead, we found that in the outyears in the federal budget papers funding to disability has plummeted by almost a quarter of a billion dollars over three years. We would have to assume from that that the federal government seems to be setting themselves up to scrap an agreement which every Australian with a disability is looking forward to or else they are trying to mask over a black hole themselves.

I will be attending a meeting of Ministers for Disability with the federal minister in Adelaide next month and I certainly intend to put this issue on the agenda, as I understand other state ministers are likely to do, to make sure that the federal government commits itself to people with a disability in future years.

**Ms NOLAN:** Page 3-3 of the MPS shows up to \$4.5 million being made available to the Endeavour Foundation in 2001-02 to address its financial problems. Do you plan to work with other disability service providers that are experiencing financial challenges?

**Ms SPENCE:** You are right. Endeavour is the largest non-government service provider for people with a disability in Queensland. They have about four and a half thousand clients. We currently fund Endeavour to the tune of \$16 million each year, but in the last year we have made special additional allocations to Endeavour of \$2.5 million. In this year's budget we have also set aside up to \$4.5 million to assist Endeavour with its viability issue.

When Endeavour alerted the government to the magnitude of its problems in late last year, the government established the Endeavour task force and began making cash injections. We also provided assistance to staff who thought they had been made redundant and, wherever possible, we met the needs of families who had previously accessed Endeavour's respite services. Endeavour has been making some tough business decisions of its own in order to claw back its financial position, and the Endeavour task force has been working closely with the organisation to this end.

We will continue to work with Endeavour. I am certainly grateful for the many heartfelt letters I have received from Endeavour clients who acknowledge the government's commitment to their organisation. However, we also acknowledge that Endeavour is not the only non-government organisation out there to be experiencing viability issues. Frankly, all of these organisations are suffering from the lack of government funding and decades of neglect. Although in the last decade governments have acknowledged their responsibility in helping these non-government organisations, we are playing catch-up. All of these organisations have

also heavily relied on charity dollars in the past. Those dollars are not as forthcoming today as they once were. I think that is a major reason for their viability issues. We want to tackle the whole viability issue in a whole-of-government way. I have instructed the department to do some strategic work with the sector in this particular field.

**Ms MALE:** Page 3-21 of the MPS shows that the department is purchasing a property at Corinda to house former residents of a state-run institution. Can you explain who will benefit from the expenditure?

**Ms SPENCE:** The five residents who live in the House at Corinda will benefit from this expenditure. I have had the great pleasure to visit McPherson Lodge with the member for Mount Ommaney—it is in her electorate—and meet the residents of this particular house. These residents were formerly residents of the Challinor Centre. I think we would all agree that, after years in an institution, they enjoy a better life. They have been enjoying a better life at McPherson Lodge.

Originally, the government was renting McPherson Lodge from Montrose, which was formerly the Queensland Society for Crippled Children. We had envisaged that the five residents would move to new accommodation when purpose-built residences at Loganlea and Bracken Ridge were completed. But when the residents and their families indicated that they would like to continue living at McPherson Lodge, the government entered into negotiations with Montrose for the purchase of the house.

The process was not straightforward because the lodge had been given to Montrose as a bequest and it was necessary to gain a Supreme Court ruling that the sale could go ahead. Montrose did purpose build a property for people with a disability in the 1970s and it is in need of some renovations, and the department has budgeted \$3,000 for those. I believe that the member for Mount Ommaney would agree with me that it is a happy home for those residents. The people from the Queensland Society for Crippled Children had a lot of foresight when they built that house in the 1970s. It is certainly outstanding accommodation for the residents today.

**Ms NOLAN:** My question relates to the Jefferis Turner Centre in Ipswich. It is something that I am interest in because I have been doing some work with John Bowen and other parents of children with disabilities up there, who provide tremendous support to their kids and do good work in the community. Page 3-21 of the MPS states that work is continuing towards a new facility on the site of the Jefferis Turner Centre in Ipswich. Can you provide us with some details of the project?

**Ms SPENCE:** Disability Services Queensland has allocated \$700,000 to replace the existing Jefferis Turner Centre at Ipswich. This is based on our determination to give people with a disability and their families modern and appropriate support facilities. A review of respite needs in Ipswich and the south-west Queensland region in 1999 showed that the Jefferis Turner Centre was not a suitable facility for respite care. The plan is to replace the centre with two dwellings: a five-bedroom respite house and a two-bedroom emergency accommodation unit. The new respite house will be situated next to an existing five-bedroom respite centre.

We have promised the families of Ipswich that there will be no reduction in the current number of Ipswich area respite beds, which accommodate five adolescents and five adults. I will stand by that promise. The new dwellings will be located on the

subdivision of the lot where the current Jefferis Turner Centre now stands. The department has been determined to ensure that this project meets the needs of families in the region so that there have been lengthy negotiations with the people who will use the centre.

Community consultation with residents within the vicinity of the old centre and the new construction site has also occurred, and I am told that the results of these consultations have been very positive. As the building is heritage listed, it was also necessary to undertake a lengthy conservation study. The new five-bedroom accommodation dwelling and the two-bedroom emergency accommodation unit went to tender on 25 June this year, and tenders closed two days ago. I am advised that the facilities should be completed by the end of this calendar year. Meanwhile, DSQ is engaged in a process to sell the Jefferis Turner Centre and existing emergency accommodation facilities.

We know that Ipswich is an area of high demand for people with a disability due in part to the displacement of people in institutions in that area. The government is rolling out funding for new respite and family support services across the state. In Ipswich, as elsewhere, we want to ensure that the service is addressing the needs of people with a disability, their families and the community as a whole.

**Ms STONE:** In the MPS I note claims that spending on institutional reform will improve the lives of a further 68 people now living in institutions. Which institutions will this cover and how will the 68 people be assisted?

**Ms SPENCE:** The total budgeted expenditure for institutional reform this year is \$2.899 million. Last year funding of \$481,000 was provided to three non-government agencies to relocate 10 people. Last year, funding of \$119,000 was provided to two government centres to provide day activities to 42 people. Last year, funding of \$2.6 million was provided to eight non-government agencies to relocate 55 people. Funding of \$288,000 was provided to two government centres to provide day activities for a total of 66 people.

Since the release of the Queensland government policy statement and planning framework on institutional reform in April 1995, eight non-government agencies commenced planning for the reform or transition of their larger residential facilities. Initially, the eight non-government agencies were allocated funding from the budget, and additional funding in this year's budget has begun the reform process. The funding this year will assist 135 people make the transition from institutional care to supported community living over the next 12 months. The majority of the non-government institutions have been undertaking some limited reform activities since the early 1990s and most have reached the point where they are unable to progress any further activity without additional funds.

The reform of these agencies also addresses some issues of organisational viability, which was placing organisations at risk of discontinuing service provision. A non-government reform working group was formed and includes seven agencies from the south-east corner of the state and Cootharinga in Townsville. The working group developed a detailed breakdown of the requirements of the eight non-government agencies. Information gathered through this working group has been used to inform deliberations around this year's budget for our Disability Services Queensland deinstitutionalisation reform process.

I had the pleasure of meeting with the working group recently. We have resolved that we will continue the working group process. I have to say that the agencies concerned are committed to the deinstitutionalisation process. It is a

matter sometimes of a lack of funds. At other times they actually have the funds but are having difficulties finding appropriate accommodation out there in the community for their residents. It is a lengthy process. We cannot move these people out of institutions quickly and we do have to take a lot of factors into account. Not only do we have to find appropriate housing, but we also have to match people correctly in that housing.

**Ms MALE:** Page 3-13 of the MPS refers to nine new respite and family support services being completed in 2001-02. How will this benefit people living in regional, rural and remote communities?

**Ms SPENCE:** Respite services provide short-term and time-out alternatives for families and people with a disability themselves. On any one day approximately 599 people in Queensland receive some sort of respite service. They might be provided by the state, local government or non-government agencies. The government is committed to boosting respite and flexible family support services throughout the state, especially in rural, regional and remote areas that were neglected for many decades.

The current funding of \$2.3 million was allocated last year for the establishment of nine new multifunction respite and family support services in Queensland, and the nine new services will support an additional 400 people. In July of this year eight services commenced service provision, with the remaining service expected to commence in August. The services are gradually building their service capacity and all are expected to be fully operational by the end of this year.

This recurrent funding increases to \$2.6 million in this year's budget. Capital costs of \$1.7 million for building purchases and modifications and equipment were met through savings from the recurrent allocation. The funding was advertised in the press and selection made on the basis of merit. The nine new services are located at Palm Island, Mossman, Emerald, Hervey Bay, Warwick, Caloundra, Nambour, north Brisbane and the Gold Coast. Of the \$2.3 million allocated last year, recurrent funding of \$0.385 million was provided as small grants to 12 existing services for service enhancement to enable them to increase operational capacity.

<sup>020</sup> The government has made it an election commitment to establish additional new respite and family support services in all regions. Various locations for these services were identified, with the remaining locations to be finalised in consultation with the sector. The locations identified for future services include Mareeba, Charters Towers, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Kingaroy, Caboolture, Boonah, Beenleigh, the Gold Coast and Brisbane.

**Ms STONE:** Page 3-3 of the MPS refers to the expansion of post-school services. What work is Disability Services Queensland undertaking to support young people making the challenging transition from school to life after school?

**Ms SPENCE:** The post-school services program supports and encourages young people with disabilities and complex support needs to make the transition from school to adult life. Examples of support include support to participate and contribute to family life, to participate in community activities and to participate in vocational options. The total budget for the post-school program this year is \$14.6 million. Of this amount, approximately \$5.1 million is for the Moving Ahead program and \$9.5 million is for Options Plus. Disability Services Queensland provided additional funding of \$1.2 million for the last six months of last year. An additional \$2.4 million for the full-year allocation results in an allocation of

\$3.6 million this year. The funding enabled 160 young adults to enter the program last year and another 160 this year.

Responsibility for the administration of funds for the post-school services program was regionalised last year. Each region has a responsibility for ensuring commitments remain within the regional budget allocations. Any savings are identified and distributed in order of priority ranking to respond to local need within each region. Flexibility of the program is being increased, as funding for individual support packages and equipment will be processed via grants of purchase orders for the next intake of post-school options.

For the first time in 2001 applicants for the Moving Ahead program are required to complete a registration of need form in addition to the Moving Ahead program application form. This process will enable the level of need to be more accurately identified and will assist us in future planning, another reason why our register of need will increase in future years. The program was initially evaluated some years ago and found that there was a high level of support for the Moving Ahead program across a range of stakeholders. The program will be evaluated in this financial year with a focus on the quality of services provided for young people and the effectiveness of the operational process. The continuation of this program will be the subject of future budget bids. It is envisaged that this program will continue into the future.

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

**Mr COPELAND:** I would like to continue on from where I left off at the last block of questions. I refer again to page 3-14 of the MPS regarding the cost per child receiving support. I understand the reasoning that the acting director-general has given—that it is a simple mathematical calculation. The question, though, is this: given that the number of children receiving support is approximately 550 more than what was estimated, hence giving the lower figure on the cost per child this year, what services have those children missed out on by not having a corresponding increase in funds allocated?

**Ms SPENCE:** We are looking at the figure on page 3-14 of the actual cost as \$12,367.

**Mr COPELAND:** That is correct.

**Ms SPENCE:** But we have budgeted \$13,365 this year.

**Mr COPELAND:** I am actually talking about the performance against the 2000-01 target.

**Ms SPENCE:** What you seem so concerned about is the fact that we budget an amount for an individual child receiving support at a higher level than the actual cost. I frankly do not have a problem with that. Every individual child's level of need is different. We are averaging out the needs across the state. So I think it is to the department's credit that it is budgeting and getting from Treasury a higher amount of money than it actually cost us last year. That does not mean that any individual child did not receive support. This is an estimated figure that we believe we need to provide the levels of support to individual children throughout the state, but these are not uniform. This is not like the cost of educating every child in a state school in Queensland. We are providing individual, tailored programs for children with a whole level of disability throughout the state. There is no one flat figure which is going to suit the needs of all children. It is going to fluctuate. So the fact that we can

actually get more money and put aside more money than we spent is a positive, and I am hoping that we can continue that.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, that leads to two questions. Firstly, if you believe that no child has missed out on services by having \$1,000 less than target for the 2000-01 year, why do you need the extra \$1,000 per child for the next year? Secondly, if you are targeting to say that you need the extra \$1,000 for the 2001-02 year, what services did they miss out on this year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think you are coming at this from the wrong way. When we start meeting the needs of a particular child who needs some support, usually their needs are urgent and that is why we go in there. It is very hard for us to estimate how much support that child is going to need into the future. Often we find that after we meet their urgent need the requirement for support plummets greatly. I think you are working from a false premise, because every individual child is going to be different. Their needs are going to be different. Saying that a child will miss out on some need or some support because we cannot spend up to our budgeted estimate is not true.

**Mr COPELAND:** With respect, if you are saying that by spending \$12,367 per child this year you have met every need that they require, why do you need the extra \$1,000?

**Ms SPENCE:** I would ask Libby Wherrett, the executive director, who has been working in this area for a long time, to give you a couple of examples of what really happens out there and how we help a child with support. I think that will make it a bit clearer for all of us in understanding this particular issue.

**Ms WHERRETT:** We have three levels of funding in the family support program; that is, high, medium and low. When we set the targets, we do not know where the family need is going to actually fall. So you could have a family situation where their needs are quite minimal. It may mean that they require respite on every second or third weekend and perhaps a bit of assistance at home with the housekeeping so the mother can be available to look after the child. In another situation, you might have a family where there are two or even three children with a disability with very high support needs who are going to require daily support. So that is where you get the variation in the amount that is required. The program provides a family support coordinator who sits down with the family to work out exactly what it is that they need so the program can be tailored.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thanks for that explanation. Moving on to page 3-21 of the MPS, the total property plant and equipment budget for 2000-01 was \$4.182 million with actual spending of \$4.488 million, yet nothing was spent on Basil Stafford and Ipswich House, and virtually nothing was spent on the respite emergency accommodation as budgeted. What unbudgeted items was the money spent on under the other acquisitions line item?

**Ms SPENCE:** The 2000-01 'Capital Acquisition Statement' as published in last year's Ministerial Portfolio Statements showed intended expenditure of, as you say, \$4.182 million. The statement has subsequently been reviewed and the estimated actual of \$4.48 million approved. The 2000-01 plan did not have allocations for some projects—that is, Loganholme Respite, Bracken Ridge Residential Care or Loganlea Residential Care—as the estimated actual position of those three projects as at 30 June 2000 had been that the projects would be completed. I do not think that actually answers your question. Would you like to ask it again, member for Cunningham?



**Mr COPELAND:** With the budgeted figures, there was \$1.125 million budgeted for Basil Stafford, \$345,000 for Ipswich House and \$700,000 for respite emergency accommodation. Virtually none of that was spent. The other acquisitions of property plant and equipment was \$2.38 million overspent. What was that \$2.38 million spent on?

**Ms SPENCE:** Good question. I am sure we can answer it. I will ask Bernie Elder from the department, who does understand the list, to give it a go.

**Mr ELDER:** We have to go back to last year's MPS document and the year before that. There were three items in the capital works plan in that particular year; that is, Bracken Ridge, Loganholme and Loganlea. At the end of 1999-2000, it was recorded that those projects were completed. In actual fact, they were not completed. Some additional expenditures were required. They were \$328,000 for Loganholme, \$440,000 for Bracken Ridge Residential Centre and \$56,000 for Loganlea. The detail that is published in the MPS document is not at that level that would show that detail. We could actually provide a schedule to you, if you wish, that would show that expenditure.

**Mr COPELAND:** If you can do that, I would appreciate that. Given that at the time of printing last year's MPS it was expected that those projects had been completed, does that now put those projects \$2.3 million over budget for those projects that were expected to be completed?

**Mr ELDER:** To be truthful, I cannot answer that question in that respect. I do know that the expenditure was required on particularly Bracken Ridge and Loganholme for warranty items with regard to those projects. It was with the Department of Housing during the first part of the last financial year when that expenditure was incurred with regard to those warranty items.

**Mr COPELAND:** When you do provide the detail of those, can you give the original budgeted figure for each of those projects and the final completed cost of those projects? Would that be possible?

**Mr ELDER:** That would be possible.

**Mr COPELAND:** Going on from that question, given that that money was spent on those other projects, apart from the \$100,000 that was spent on the respite emergency accommodation, effectively nothing has been spent on the three items that were actually budgeted for.

**Ms SPENCE:** In terms of Basil Stafford, that money was budgeted for in moving that number of people out of Basil Stafford. The money is still there. The reason that it has not occurred is because we are still working with those families on choosing the locations for them in the community. As I said before, these things take time. I met with the residents of Basil Stafford myself recently. It is not simply a matter of finding a house in the community that will suit that resident. The resident does not necessarily get their own house in the community. They have to usually share with two or, more likely, three other people because that is the level of support package that they get.

<sup>021</sup> Choosing two or three other people to live with for the rest of your life takes a lot of time, and the families do not want those decisions to be the wrong decisions either. Even if you have chosen two or three other people that you think your son or daughter might be able to live with, then you have to agree with all of those other families on the location. Where are they going to live? Even if they can decide on a suburb, then we have to find a house that is suitable. We do not want to make the

mistakes of the past and choose houses that are going to have unfriendly neighbours, because these people have high support needs. So we have to find the right house.

I am not critical of the department that it has not moved faster on this, because I have talked to those families and I know that we are working very hard with those families to try to make these choices right for these people. Frankly, it is not the families who are necessarily desperate. There might be one or two. I have certainly spoken to one mother who is desperate to get her daughter out of there, but no-one else will live with her daughter, frankly. And we cannot afford to have her daughter out there living in a house by herself because of her high support needs.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Some of them have lived in institutions for most of their lives.

**Ms SPENCE:** Most of them have. I am not critical of that one. In terms of Corinda lodge, as I said in answer to a question from a government member earlier, we have done it. We have bought it. Ipswich House was the other one you referred to?

**Mr COPELAND:** Yes, and also respite and emergency accommodation.

**Ms SPENCE:** Ipswich House is still pending. I will let Libby Wherrett talk to that matter.

**Ms WHERRETT:** Ipswich House relates to an individual house for an individual person. The negotiations are still continuing with the family about whether it will be in Ipswich or whether it will actually be in Townsville.

**Ms SPENCE:** The respite facility is the Jefferis Turner one, which I mentioned before—the place at Ipswich.

**Mr COPELAND:** Just to clarify, is the \$1.125 million relating to Basil Stafford to be spent at Basil Stafford or is it to be spent on accommodation for those people who are moving out of Basil Stafford?

**Ms SPENCE:** That is money for housing for those people who are moving out of Basil Stafford. Ultimately, when we have settled on the housing, we will transfer that money over to the Department of Housing, which will actually deliver the accommodation for us.

**Mr COPELAND:** I agree that these things can take time, but I note from page 3-21 of the 2001-02 MPS that the \$345,000 budgeted for 2000-01 for Ipswich House was not spent, but deferred. The note states—

Construction of an appropriate dwelling is deferred due to continuing discussions on long term tenant choices and options and assessment of requirements.

However, I note from the MPS for 2000-01 that that same amount of money had been budgeted for 1999-2000 for the project. It was not spent in that year—obviously this is going to sound familiar—because 'construction of an appropriate dwelling is being delayed due to continuing discussions on long term tenant choices and options'. That was budgeted for 1999 and it has been deferred now until 2001-02. Is it actually going to happen?

**Ms SPENCE:** With the closure of the Challinor Centre there was a commitment to construct a house in the community of Ipswich for a client. Originally it was proposed that this house was to be built at Ipswich. Then Toowoomba was identified as a more appropriate location. The client is currently living alone in a house rented from the Department of Housing in Ipswich, awaiting finalisation of this long-term accommodation.

The client and his two sisters, who live in Toowoomba and Townsville, were expressing different views about the location of the client's long-term support arrangement. Toowoomba was the preferred option of one sister, who had significant contact with the client since he was admitted to Challinor. Planning then commenced on identifying tenants for the client on the basis of his preference.

After a holiday in Townsville in early 2000, the client expressed a clear preference for moving to Townsville. On this basis, Townsville was the preferred option for the other sister and for this man's advocate. This man has been maintaining a strong preference for Townsville as the location for his long-term accommodation arrangement.

As there is a clear difference of opinion between the client and his two sisters, further negotiations were held with the client and his family, with a final decision being made for him to relocate to Townsville. Since that time the staff of DSQ have been liaising with the Department of Housing in Townsville around provision of a purpose-built house in that area, and work has recently commenced on the construction of a unit in Townsville. That is Ipswich House.

I think that is a really good example of why DSQ does not build overnight and why it takes so much time talking to these clients, many of whom cannot talk for themselves. We also have to deal with families—not just the family of one client but also the families of other clients who are going to share accommodation with these people. These decisions take time. This is not like, 'Why can't you build a convention centre in your agreed-upon 12 months?' This is dealing with real people.

**Mr COPELAND:** I understand the difficulties that have been involved in that particular project. However, I note that exactly the same thing has happened with the money allocated to Basil Stafford, which was also allocated in the 1999-2000 budget and has also been deferred through the 2000-01 budget and now the 2001-02 budget. Can we be confident that that money will be spent in this financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the \$1.125 million for Basil Stafford actually has been paid. It was paid last month to the Department of Housing. So that is happening. I think that brings us back to the point you are trying to get at here. You are trying to say that the department cannot spend its capital works budget on time. I know about capital works. I have been on the Public Works Committee; I have chaired the Public Works Committee and I have a Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy which is responsible for an infrastructure budget.

In all the circumstances, we do expect our capital works to be built on time and on budget. I have to say that if this department could not deliver projects on time or on budget I would be angry, too. But I am new in this portfolio. I have been here only four months. It is not until you go out there and talk to people at Basil Stafford and talk to people in the community that you understand that this is not a department that can deliver things in a matter of months. These things, because they deal with real people, are going to take some time. It is better to take the time than to satisfy the requirements of an MPS statement. It is better to get people's lives right, rather than mess it up because we are on the department's back to spend up the capital works budget.

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

**Ms NOLAN:** Minister, page 3-1 of the MPS talks about strengthening individuals, families and communities. I understand that the department has a Volunteer Friends Program. Can you describe how the program works?

**Ms SPENCE:** This is particularly relevant in this International Year of the Volunteer. The Volunteer Friends Program currently supports people with an intellectual disability to connect in friendship with people from the broader community. This is achieved through one-to-one friendships, reconnecting families and friends, and connecting people to community groups. \$400,000 has been allocated to the development and implementation of the project. The funding will be ongoing.

The repeal of the Intellectually Disabled Citizens Act 1985, which previously governed the role and referral base of the volunteer friends project, has resulted in DSQ undertaking a redevelopment project. The aims of the project are to enhance opportunities for people with a disability to establish and sustain friendships, establish friendship support as a core feature of DSQ, identify and directly support people with a disability most socially isolated, and develop resources to facilitate the support of friendship by services.

In my remaining time I would like to give a few examples of how this program really works. There is an example of how two fellows, John and Greg, were introduced through the Volunteer Friends Program more than 10 years ago. Over the years John has faced many challenges in his living situation, moving from hostel to hostel and at times being hospitalised to stabilise his medication. John's friendship with Greg has been the one stable factor in his life. Both men are always there for each other, particularly in times of crisis. John is now also involved with Greg's family and other friends.

Paul and Warren were introduced through the Volunteer Friends Program two years ago. Both men initially shared an interest in nature but have since discovered many more mutual interests. Paul used to avoid using public transport. This resulted in him spending a lot of time at home on his own. Warren has assisted Paul to use public transport, in part inspired by the reciprocal nature of their friendship. Paul and Warren have now decided to flat together, a good indication of how well they get on.

There are many, many examples of the success of the Volunteer Friends Program. It is a small budget allocation, but it is an important part of DSQ's work that we facilitate these community opportunities, because we know that there are a number of good people out there in the community who, given support by the department, will really assist the lives of people who have a disability.

**Ms MALE:** Page 3-2 of the MPS acknowledges that some people with a disability have historically been disadvantaged when accessing services. I believe that, although guide dogs are recognised under state legislation, assistance dogs have no legal status. This is despite the fact that they are valued companions for many people with a disability. Are you planning to address this anomaly?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, I am. In fact, I suspect that not too many of us have heard about assistance dogs. I certainly had not until I went to the community cabinet meeting in Toowoomba and met some assistance dogs myself. They are very important to many people who have disabilities and they enrich their lives.

**Mr COPELAND:** I have also met those dogs.

**Ms SPENCE:** You would have met those dogs. The dogs are not quiet and neither are their owners!

Assistance dogs are not as widely known as guide dogs, but they assist in a range of areas. For example, they might open and close doors, turn on light switches, assist with shopping activities, fetch items beyond the reach of the person with a disability or even get the phone. Because they do not have any legislative status, for example under the Guide Dogs Act, assistance dogs, and indeed their owners, have been discriminated against by places such as shopping centres and public transport. Obviously this is causing concern. We plan to change that.

I have given a commitment to assistance dogs and their owners that we will amend the Disability Services Act some time later this year so that people who have visual and hearing impairments and enjoy the support of assistance dogs will have the legal recognition that guide dogs currently have under that legislation.

**Ms STONE:** This week has seen an event called Four Days in July, part of an action forum organised by Queensland Advocacy Inc. I understand that the forum has generated many thousands of words of Internet discussion about a broad range of issues affecting people with a disability. I have also noted that page 3-2 of the MPS refers to increasing advocacy and support for people with a disability in the development of policy. Has Disability Services Queensland given any support to this forum?

**Ms SPENCE:** We have provided only a small amount of money, \$50,000, to assist in this forum. This will help to subsidise a number of people to attend the four-day forum and also help other people get Internet access to the forum. The forum is the first of its type in Australia. It really was done without any government assistance, except for that small financial assistance which we provided towards the end. It is entirely the efforts of the Queensland Advocacy Incorporated group, which is a group of people with disabilities. It has been an extraordinary forum of very intelligent debate on topics from a wide range of speakers. I had the great opportunity to attend the dinner for the forum on Monday night and perhaps listened to the best after-dinner speaker I have ever heard from in my life, a man called Matt Laffan, who recently starred on *Australian Story*—a Sydney lawyer who has severe disabilities himself.

“” Participation in the forum underlies a major theme that people with a disability want to get across to the rest of us in the community, that is, it is important for them to be able to share their stories and their experiences and their successes, and that is what this forum has been all about. Obviously, not everyone with a disability could attend the forum, so there has been a very strong emphasis in the months leading up to the forum and during the forum on Internet accessibility. The one great thing I think for people with a disability in this world has been the invention of computers and, indeed, Internet access. They communicate all the time through the Internet, share information, share experiences and certainly our methods on how to lobby governments. It has been terrific.

**Ms NOLAN:** Minister, I note on page 3-19 of the MPS that the department allocated \$13.5 million in grants and subsidies for community and infrastructure support in 2000-01. Is the department assisting an innovative community group called Parent to Parent to spread its message to families throughout Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, we are working in partnership with Parent to Parent. This is a group which grew out of the government's commitment to nurturing grassroots community organisations in the sector. We do not believe that the government is the font of all wisdom. Parent to Parent has a statewide centre at Yandina and local groups located around the state. Its mission is to support, empower and enrich

families who have a member with a disability so that they can positively influence society to accept people with a disability as valued citizens.

Parent to Parent was first funded by DSQ in 1998-99, and this organisation has been allocated \$152,675 in recurrent funding. This has supported four small, semiautonomous groups at the Gold Coast, Fraser Coast, Rockhampton and Mackay, as well as the Yandina centre. Since 1999 the organisation has branched out with six groups benefiting from seeding grants, and they are located at Gladstone, Emerald, Brisbane North, Brisbane South, Dalby and Roma. I understand that a group in Townsville will be starting shortly.

I have to say Parent to Parent are good attendees at community cabinets. So I have met a number of members of their organisation. We are very pleased to support them. We have recently also allocated non-recurrent funding of \$32,000 for them to distribute an information guide for parents of a child diagnosed with a disability. An additional \$5,000 in non-recurrent funding was also provided to assist in conducting training and a forum in Mount Isa.

There is no doubt many people feel bewildered and powerless when they learn that their child has a disability, and people who go through this process spend many months—sometimes longer—navigating through government agencies and medical facilities trying to get some support, trying to find out where therapy exists and trying to decipher acronyms. Parent to Parent cuts through all that. It provides these parents with the information that they need, and it includes recommendations and also personal anecdotes from parents who have been there. I think it is a very important group in our community, and we want to do everything we can to ensure their success in future years. Disability Services Queensland is conducting another funding round to assist organisations in relation to this kind of viability, and \$950,000 is allocated for the statewide allocations. So we assume that we will be supporting other parent-type groups in this type of activity.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, referring to MPS page 3-23, I ask whether Disability Services Queensland has an information service and, if so, what does this service deliver, and is it being widely utilised by the community?

**Ms SPENCE:** We do have an information service called DIAL—the Disability Information Awareness Line. It had a budget of \$200,000 last year and received 12,724 inquiries. That is an average of about 49 phone calls a day. The increased use of DIAL reflects the greater visibility of Disability Services Queensland as a separate stand-alone agency for people with a disability. The inquiries are specifically about funding and programs that might be available. We would expect to see a continued increase in this area roughly in line with increasing community knowledge. Calls about respite care are steady, as respite is a constant issue for a family.

In order of frequency of calls, the most asked about issues related to information on service providers, information on multiple services, funding, accommodation and respite care. But DIAL is not just about phone calls. The service also operates a home page, the DIAL resource library, DIAL diagnostic files which maintain information about disability and conditions appropriate for families, health care professionals, support workers and students.

Disability awareness training is provided at a cost to government departments and private organisations. The demand for this training has increased by over 50 per cent this year even though no marketing has been undertaken. DIAL talks are provided at no cost to community groups, Queensland police, community health

and anyone who has an interest in the functions of DIAL. So there we are, members; there is a group to come out and speak at a function in your electorate for you.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, the MPS at page 3-1 acknowledges that a major source of support for people with a disability is their families and informal networks. Are there any plans to recognise the efforts of the individuals who voluntarily care for people with a disability?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, there is. Volunteers and families we know are a most important part of the service system for people with a disability in Queensland. That is why we are working on the development of carers recognition legislation, which is a government commitment. Initial discussions have been held with the CEO of the Queensland Council of Carers to determine the most appropriate agency to provide the leadership for developing the carers recognition act.

Initially it was intended that DSQ would develop this carers recognition act, but I have had representation from other carers in Queensland who are concerned that if the act is just developed by DSQ it will be seen to be only recognising people who are caring for the disabled. In fact, we know out there a lot of carers are looking after the elderly and the infirm. So it is my intention that DSQ will work with the Department of Families to ensure that, when we develop this carers recognition act in consultation with the community, we encompass the broad range of carers out there and it is not just seen to be an act about people who are caring for people with a disability. Funding for the development of the legislation will be sourced from both departments' budgets, and we do not believe that it will require additional funding in this financial year.

**Ms NOLAN:** Minister, the MPS at page 3-16 includes initiatives to build community awareness of disability issues. I ask whether Disability Services Queensland is currently helping to raise the profile of issues that impact on people with a disability.

**Ms SPENCE:** We have. This is an important issue to discuss, I think, in this Disability Access Week. The department plays an important role in raising community awareness of the issues of people with a disability every week of the year, but Disability Access Week has an allocated budget of \$30,000. We also receive funding from Queensland Transport and the Office of Rural Communities through support of \$2,000 each in sponsorship. This year, more than 60 community-based events occurred throughout Queensland, including art exhibitions, sporting events, access forums, debutante balls and concerts.

I think this part of DSQ's charter, that is, improving community awareness, remains one of the important issues in the whole area of the disability field in this state. I have had people with disabilities themselves come to say to me that too much focus is always placed on money and how much money is spent in this sector. And that is, of course, very important because we know a lot of the problems of this sector can be solved with money. But while the sector and ourselves continually just talk about money, then we are not talking about the other very important issues that people with a disability are faced with in everyday life, and they are access issues. Access is more than just about ramps, and it is more than just about getting bridges right; it is also about making sure that people with a disability are welcome in the community as our neighbours and in our schools and in every other community organisation. So it is an important charter, and we do not want to lose sight of that community awareness.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, the MPS at page 3-9 refers to the relocation of another 30 people from the Basil Stafford Centre to the community. You have earlier today discussed the difficulties of allocating accommodation. What undertakings have you given to parents and friends of Basil Stafford residents that the residents will be able to exercise choice about their future under the process of institutional reform?

**Ms SPENCE:** There are 48 people currently living in Basil Stafford. All of them have high support needs. We expect during the next year at least 30 people will want to leave that centre, leaving about 18. But that figure is fluid. Although we have budgeted for that this year, we might exceed it and we might not, because I expect the 30 could grow or shrink depending on the desires of those families. People do change their minds. Some of these families take a long time to be convinced that deinstitutionalising their son or daughter is in their best interests, and they do change their minds frequently. So although we have budgeted for a certain number of people to move out of Basil Stafford, and we will certainly be supporting that this year, we expect somewhere in the vicinity of 15 to 18 families may want to stay on the Basil Stafford site. I have given my commitment that we will allow those people to stay on the Basil Stafford site.

What this will mean long term is rebuilding on that site. Ultimately, when we finish up with 15 or so people on that site—if that is the number we end up with—we do not want necessarily to house them in their current accommodation. I would expect that we will purpose build some new and better accommodation on the Basil Stafford site for the remnants of the people who are left. But they will be housed in houses on the site, and we will try to make those houses as much a part of the normal community as possible.

I do not know if too many of you have ever visited Basil Stafford, but it is a very large site, and across the road is a suburban community. So I believe that we will be able to build on the front of that site as much in suburbia as possible so that the 15-odd people who are left will not be seen to be living in an institution but in normal houses in a more urban environment than they are now.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, I note at page 3-8 of the MPS that the department has developed a new service structure for Project 300. What other measures has Disability Services Queensland taken to improve access to services for people with a psychiatric disability?

**Ms SPENCE:** Currently one in five Queenslanders will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, and close to one in three will develop a significant disability as a result of that illness. Queenslanders with a psychiatric disability in their families have been historically disadvantaged in accessing the disability services and supports they need to enable them to attain a quality lifestyle. In recognition of this, the Queensland government released a strategic plan for psychiatric disability services and support 2000 to 2005 in December last year. The plan was developed following consultation with the broader community during July and August. Over 660 people attended 64 community and staff consultations held across the state.

The plan is a major step in raising the profile and positive image of people with a psychiatric disability. It provides a clear statement of the commitment of Disability Services Queensland to psychiatric disability over the next five years and identifies what the department will do to provide people with psychiatric disability and their families better access to support and services.



<sup>023</sup> We are working, obviously, with a number of other government agencies on progressing strategies within the plan. The alliance, the peak body for the sector, was funded jointly in 1998-99 by DSQ and Queensland Health. The alliance enables people with a psychiatric disability, their families, community services and support groups to have more input into the policies that affect them. In May last year, the DSQ released a booklet titled *Services and Support for People with a Psychiatric Disability* as a resource to government and the community. This booklet lists key government departments and agencies that will provide services to people with a psychiatric disability. We have also funded the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill to develop an information booklet titled *Supporting People with Psychiatric Disabilities*. Both booklets have been widely distributed across the state.

We have allocated a quarter of a million dollars to the development of a flexible respite and family support service for people with a psychiatric disability and their families. This service is located in the northern suburbs of Brisbane and complements one funded in the southern suburbs of Brisbane in 1999-2000. So these are the first respite and family support services funded by a Queensland government specifically for people with psychiatric disabilities and their families.

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

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I concur with your earlier comments that we do sometimes spend too much time talking about the money and not the other issues, but unfortunately that is one of the by-products of this particular process, especially. I also welcome your commitment for those 15 to 18 people who will be remaining at Basil Stafford. Certainly, the care that they receive there is excellent. Once the 20 or 30 residents who will be moving out—and as you say, that is a fluid number—will people who are not currently located

at Basil Stafford who wish to be located at Basil Stafford have the opportunity to go there?

**Ms SPENCE:** Where will people who are—

**Mr COPELAND:** If people who are not already residents of Basil Stafford express a desire to go into Basil Stafford, will they be allowed to do that?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think that is a possibility. As I said, what the department will be doing in the next year is developing a master plan for the Basil Stafford site. We have never done that before, probably because we did not know how many people we would be keeping on that site in the long run. But now that we have established that we are going to have somewhere between 15 and 18 people on the Basil Stafford site, we will start doing a master plan for that site.

So I can foresee that if there are families of people who wish to move into Basil Stafford in the future, that can be part of that master plan. Let's face it, if we purpose build housing accommodation and support services for 18 people, the current 18 people who we build for are not going to reside there forever. People are going to pass on and I would expect that we will move other people onto that site if they request that.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thanks. I welcome that news. Given the ongoing process of deinstitutionalisation—the imminent movement of those residents out of Basil Stafford—can I ask how much it costs currently to care for those people in Basil

Stafford? How much is it budgeted to cost to care for them once they leave Basil Stafford?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am just finding out what it costs us now. What we budget for is a package of up to \$150,000 per individual; that is an institutional reform package. So it is up to \$150,000 per individual. Not every individual will necessarily need or require the \$150,000, but that is the maximum.

**Mr COPELAND:** And you will get the other figure?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. Someone is doing the sum for us. I think that it is an important point that we remember that we budget only up to \$150,000, and that is why people have to share accommodation. To support an individual from Basil Stafford in their own home will cost in excess of \$300,000 in support need. Frankly, I am sure you will agree with me that the government cannot afford \$300,000 per person. We are finding it tough to provide \$150,000 per package as it is. So that is why people have to share accommodation and, depending on their support needs, that is what determines whether they are going to end up having to share with one other person or two other people.

**Mr COPELAND:** Perhaps if we continue on and come back.

**Ms SPENCE:** We do have to understand these things. We do have in Queensland some individuals who, because of their desperate support needs, are in individual houses and we are spending in excess of \$300,000 on them. I do not think that this is a situation—there are about seven of them in the state—that we can sustain in the future. As we know, their level of disability and needs is going to rise and we do have to rationalise and provide the very best support that we can within our allocated budget. On average—we have quickly calculated it—it is costing us about \$147,000 per individual to keep them in Basil Stafford. So this is not a cost-saving measure from the government. When I talk about the support packages being \$150,000, that is not going to include the cost of the housing; that is just their recurrent support needs.

**Mr COPELAND:** I agree completely that it may not be the most cost-effective way of doing it and to rationalise, to make sure that people do get the best care available, is what the government has to do. Referring back to one of your earlier answers regarding Ipswich House, it is a cost, I believe, of \$345,000 for one individual resident; is that correct?

**Ms SPENCE:** That would not be the recurrent expenditure. That was the capital cost of building the house.

**Mr COPELAND:** Effectively, it is a cost for that single person, though. I do not want to particularly highlight that person, but would we have any idea of what recurrent amount that person would also receive?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not know about this person, but I am happy to say to you that at the top end of the scale, as I said before, we are probably spending just over \$300,000 on an individual. I know that we are supporting at least seven individuals around the state at that top end of the scale. You might ask why. It is because those individuals have very high support needs. They are all young—they are all in their late teens, 20s—and they have very violent tendencies. Some of them need two carers as support most of the time. So I think that we need to understand that. That is where a lot of the money in this area is going. I think that we do need to look at how much we can spend per individual in the future given, as we all know, the high level of unmet need in our community.

**Mr COPELAND:** In response to a question on notice from Mrs Pratt—and I am sorry, I do not have the number of that question with me—the budget for 2000-01 for the complaints system was \$170,000. For 2001-02, the budget will be \$100,000. Could you explain that decrease?

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the reason for decrease is that the establishment costs were in that initial figure and now we have just got the recurrent costs of the officer funded for, but I will let the department explain that further.

**Ms WHERRETT:** The additional establishment costs would have gone to some of the consultation that occurred and the production of materials and protocol booklets that were circulated to all the DSQ officers and all the NGOs around the state. So the recurrent costs now relate to the officer who will be running that process from central office. In addition, we have also got complaints officers located in all the regions, but there are no additional costs there because current staff are taking that on as part of their role.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for non-government members has expired. The member for Ipswich.

**Ms NOLAN:** On page 3-2 of the MPS it says that the department aims to involve people with a disability and their families in the development of policies, programs and services. What has been done to ensure that people with a disability and their families have a say in the policy and operation of the DSQ?

**Ms SPENCE:** The government—as the previous member just talked about in terms of money—established a complaints mechanism system in January this year. The policy and procedures enabled people with disabilities and their families to raise complaints about the DSQ's direct services and services funded by the department. Complaints have provided valuable feedback and have resulted in enhancements of service provision to a range of people with disabilities.

DSQ recognises the ongoing potential of the complaints management system to ensuring opportunities for continuous improvement. The DSQ strategic plan acknowledged the need to improve the quality of services through the implementation of the quality framework and the introduction of an internal complaints mechanism. DSQ's policies and procedures for complaints were developed in accordance with the Australian standards for complaint handling. Information about the policies and procedures was provided to funded services and DSQ services in the form of booklets, as Libby just mentioned.

We have a central office complaints officer, who provides training and ongoing support to our regional staff. Regional staff have been trained and will continue to be trained in this complaints process. During the first four months of operation, 47 complaints and 104 inquiries were received. Of the complaints, 22 were about DSQ's services and 25 were about funded services.

**Ms STONE:** I note on page 3-19 of the MPS that the department expects to issue \$14.37 million in grants and subsidies for community and infrastructure support. I ask if the government will ensure that funds held in what was known as the Legacy Trust Fund will be used for the benefit of visually impaired people in Queensland.

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. As many of those members who participated in that debate would be aware, the Legacy Trust Fund now contains \$387,000. The legal ambiguity about the purpose of the fund clouded its future, causing it to be closed in 1997. We have now, through the passing of that legislation, freed up that \$387,000.

On 1 July, Vision Queensland merged with the Royal Blind Society. I recently had the pleasure of having lunch with the foundation and scores of volunteers who are the mainstay of that particular organisation. People who were at the lunch were certainly pleased to hear that \$380,000 was freed up for expenditure. I understand that in August, after the act is proclaimed, that money will become free and we will advertise the existence of those funds and disburse them among the Society for Visually Impaired in Queensland.

**The CHAIRMAN:** We have no further questions. Does the member for Cunningham want to ask one?

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, on page 3-23 of the MPS relating to user charges, there is an increase of \$40,000 explained as higher than expected rent received by the department. Why are you budgeting the same figure in 2001-02 as was budgeted for 2000-01 but actually exceeded?

<sup>024</sup> **Ms SPENCE:** I will ask Cesare Callioni to answer that one.

**Mr CALLIONI:** The figure relates to two types of receipts. One is primarily rent receipts from the Intellectual Disability Unit and state government housing. The other is from the sale of gazettes and publications. The estimate for 2001-02 has been left at the 2000-01 budget level, as we believe that part of the receipts we received in 2000-01 will be one-off.

**Mr COPELAND:** Could you explain what those one-off receipts were?

**Mr CALLIONI:** I cannot give a breakdown exactly, but they do relate primarily to the level of rent that we will be receiving from state government housing.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time for the consideration of the estimates in the area of Disability Services has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. I remind the minister and departmental officials that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the *Hansard* Internet Quick Access website within two hours from now. The hearing is now suspended and we will resume at 4 p.m. with the consideration of the proposed expenditure for the Department of Families.

Sitting suspended from 4.45 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The hearing of Estimates Committee G is now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families. The time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers be allotted to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally proportioned between government and non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question so that *Hansard* can record the information, and that mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Families to be open for examination. Minister, if you would like to make a further introductory statement for this component of your portfolio, the committee again asks that you limit it to three minutes.

**Ms SPENCE:** It might surprise you but I will forgo my right to make an introductory statement in the interests of my voice, as I have been speaking for hours now.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Certainly.

**Ms SPENCE:** I will introduce the departmental officers at the table with me. On my right is Mr Frank Peach, the Director-General of the Department of Families. Also, Mr Russell Loos, the Manager of Service Strategy. On my left is Pauline Ross, the Deputy Director-General of the Department of Families and to the left of Pauline is Cesare Callioni, the Director of Finance and Administration.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The first block of questions will commence with the non-government members. I call the member for Cunningham.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I again thank your departmental staff for the time that they have given us this afternoon. I note that the budget papers refer only to employer expenses for the 2001-02 period. Could you please provide us with the full-time equivalent staff numbers of youth case workers for the years 1998-99, 1999-2000, 2000-01 and 2001-02?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am sure we can. We do not have them at hand, but we believe that we can get those figures by the end of the session.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you. How do you explain the fact that some officers in Queensland are handling up to 40 cases and, from recent reports, numbers even in excess of that whereas in, for example, Victoria Families staff have a cap of 15 cases? Have you spoken to the Victorian Families Minister to determine whether a similar system can be put in place in Queensland?

**Ms SPENCE:** This issue is not new. It has been drawn to our attention for some time that the child protection workers, particularly in Queensland, are dealing with significant caseloads and that some other states of Australia, indeed, do it better. This has been an issue that has been around for a long time.

We all have to understand that what we are dealing with in Queensland is decades of neglect. We inherited a child protection system that has been underfunded by many Queensland governments. It goes back through this century, but the member for Cunningham is new to this place. There is no proud record in the area of child protection under National Party governments in this state. We are playing catch-up in terms of our funding in the area of child protection. Our Family Services officers are carrying, yes, heavy caseloads and we are grateful that they do that.

That is why the Beattie government, more than any other Queensland government, is dedicated to reforming the child protection system in this state. That is why we have allocated more money in this area than any other state government previous to us. We made a commitment to find an additional \$100 million over four years to put just into the area of child protection. That meant that we added an additional \$10 million to the budget in 1999-2000, \$20 million to the budget last year and \$30 million to the budget this year. In fact, we have done better than the \$30 million we have promised. We have found an additional \$35 million, which will become recurrent funding for the child protection budget.

We are performing as well as we can in the area of child protection and we will continue to ensure that this area gets increased funding in future years. You cannot overcome decades of neglect in one night. We do have to work in this area of child protection on a number of fronts. It is not just about the workload and the caseloads

that are being carried by our child protection officers. It is also about the foster parents, whom I suspect many of you are not surprised to hear are underpaid compared to foster parents in other states in Australia.

We also have to work with agencies that have been providing services on an underfunded basis for a long time. We have to deal with the fact that there are not enough juvenile centres to send young people to who are not necessarily right for foster parents. There are a lot of areas that need catch-up funding and attention in this state, and we have resolved that we will do that and make that commitment in budgets not only in the past three years but in future years.

**Mr COPELAND:** I am pleased that you recognise that your staff have to deal with huge caseloads, because you have twice refused to give answers to questions on notice that I have put to you regarding caseloads in Queensland. The first time you said that caseloads are an accrued measure of work and the second time you said that you did not have that data. Could you please advise how you expect to manage the problems currently facing your department when you do not even know what the workload is that you are expecting those people to carry?

**Ms SPENCE:** That is not true. The department has gone through a number of methods of measuring caseloads in the past 18 months. We are going through another method at the moment of measuring our caseloads. I would say to you that I am not going to walk away from the fact that I acknowledge that the staff in the Department of Families do a tremendous job, work very hard and perhaps harder than their colleagues in other states. We can sit here and argue about caseloads. The Forde inquiry told us years ago that the caseloads in the Department of Families are too high and that they are lower in other states. This is not anything new. Your revelations, or the *Courier-Mail* FOI requests, are nothing new. We have known that for a long time and that is why we are committed to making sure that we add additional money to the Department of Families' budgets to put on new child protection officers and Family Services officers.

That is why we have put on an additional 154 frontline child protection officers in the last two years and why we have budgeted for an additional 50 this year. Those are new child protection officers. Over 200 will be added to the department in a three-year period. We hope that this will improve the caseloads of our child protection workers. Obviously that is our intention.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I am glad you recognise that this is not a new problem and that it has existed for some time, which prompts me to ask: why have you been trying to hide the current figures by refusing two of my requests for that exact detail and only releasing information via FOI as a result of Supreme Court action?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will give you the department's reply to that particular issue. Prior to April 2001, the absence of a systematic method of matching resources to productivity and/or outputs meant that allocation of additional resources relied on historical input into regions or area offices. During 2001, the department developed a method to allocate resources on the basis of throughput and productivity for each area office. Based on the department's core business of child protection and youth justice activity, the method combined unweighted components of this work to profile area offices. The methodology was presented to the Queensland Public Sector Union in April 2001. Subsequent refinement of the method has occurred that allows the weighting of these work components and adjustments for factors impacting on area offices to better reflect relative workloads between area officers.

What does this mean? This means that the department has been working with its officers for quite a time now, in fact over a year, to try to measure caseloads, to try to measure workloads. The figures that were released in the *Courier-Mail* some months ago we believe—and many in the department believe—were based on poor methodology and did not accurately reflect the workloads of our child protection workers. That is why a different system of measuring that workload has been developed this year.

We have a new system of measuring now. What we are now doing is sitting down with the union and, indeed, our staff to see if they agree with our new measurement system. It might surprise you that they do not all agree. They want to refine the way we now measure their caseloads. We are going through that process now. The department has been in intense consultations with the unions and I am very hopeful that very soon we are going to come to some agreement about how we measure workloads.

Until that time comes, I am not happy to have any figures out there in the public arena. The figures that have previously been out there we believe are flawed figures. Many in the department believe they are flawed figures. We are now working on a better way of measuring the workload.

**Mr COPELAND:** If those figures were flawed, why was it in need of urgent cabinet attention?

**Ms SPENCE:** Why was it in need of urgent cabinet attention? This is not urgent cabinet attention. It has been in the pipeline for some time to have cabinet consider a submission from the Department of Families about the workload issues in the department generally. We know that we have been significantly adding to the budget of Families in the last few years, but it has not necessarily resulted in a decrease in the workload of our child protection officers in particular.

We have to ask ourselves, why, when we have added 154 new child protection officers in a space of two years, have we not seen a subsequent decline in the workload? There is a simple answer to that. It is not because the child protection notifications have increased significantly during that time. It is because new child protection legislation, which was produced by the parliament last year, has significantly added to the workload of our child protection officers. While every child protection worker I have talked to in Queensland, and that has been quite a few, applauds this new legislation - they think it is overdue and they think it is good legislation - they all tell me that it has added an enormous burden of work to their schedule. We really have to assess how we are going to look at our funding and our provision of child protection officers in the future.

There are a whole range of issues surrounding workloads and how we deal with child protection that I believe—and the Premier believes—cabinet needs to consider. Certainly if we are going to look at future funding increases for this department, then it is proper that the whole of cabinet looks at this issue.

**Mr COPELAND:** Given that you have said that the information that was published was flawed information and that you are trying to develop a new measure of workload that more accurately measures of what your staff do, does that mean that you dismiss the concerns of the staff who are out there having to work with children and who simply cannot respond to the number of children that are reported to them?

<sup>025</sup> **Ms SPENCE:** Can you say that again? I missed a bit. Start again.

**Mr COPELAND:** Given that you think that the information that was published and the numbers in that report were flawed and given that you are currently determining a new way of measuring workloads that more accurately reflect what your staff do, does that mean that you dismiss the concerns of your front-line staff who feel that they do not have enough staff to adequately respond to the cases that are reported to them?

**Ms SPENCE:** I absolutely do not dismiss their concerns at all. I take their concerns very seriously. I know that they are genuine in their concerns. That is why we have been going through this process of properly managing their workloads. That is why we have been going through a process—the whole department, particularly the senior executive service of the department—of listening to those front-line workers and trying to ascertain how much additional work the new legislation has created for them. We have put a number of proposals to the union—to our workers. In recent months we have devised a 10-point plan with the union designed to target specific pressure points in the direct service delivery system, the systematic reform of the child protection system and the commissioning of a new area office.

**Mr COPELAND:** Given that the figures that unassessed priority 1 abuse cases rose from 202 last July to 770 in March this year, the number of priority 2 cases had risen from 323 to 2,029 and priority 3 cases had risen from 142 to 462, how can you say that there really is no crisis in your department when so many of these vulnerable children—perhaps the most vulnerable in our society—are being left exposed to harm without assessment?

**Ms SPENCE:** The suggestion that 707 cases, for example, remain unassessed is wrong. The moment a telephone call alleging suspected abuse is received, a professional decision is made to determine if this is a notification requiring an initial assessment response for the child's safety needs. Of the children requiring a response, they are assigned a priority rating on the level of likely significant harm and the urgency or danger associated with it. If it is a priority 1 notification, that is high level, investigation commences within 24 hours. A priority 2 notification is assessed as medium level and a priority 3 notification is where the child is assessed as being at risk of low level of harm or danger. Priority 2 and 3 cases are regularly reviewed to determine the response time required.

The workload management report was introduced in September 2000. The early inputting of material was slow for the first six months as regional systems developed. So the report showed an artificially low base. As more information was put in place, it showed a rise in the number of reports.

I want to make the point that there has been a three per cent increase each year over the last four years in the number of child protection notification issues. These are the people who ring in with a child protection issue. Given that the Queensland population has risen by about two per cent over the last four years, a three per cent rise is not alarming. But why do we have a rise? Is it because there is a lot more child abuse going on out there? We do not know. What we do know is that we have been out there publicly talking about this issue a lot more. The new child protection legislation involved consultation throughout the states. All our agencies, our schools, our hospitals and our police are alerted more than they ever were in the past. The community is alerted more than they ever were in the past. I believe that we are getting that small three per cent rise because we have done a better job of publicising the importance of notifying us on these issues. There has not been an



alarming increase at all in the number of child protection notifications in this state. It is as simple as that.

**Mr COPELAND:** So you do not agree with those figures?

**Ms SPENCE:** I have already told you that there is a reason for those figures. The reason is that we started to compile those figures in September last year on a centralised databank. The fact that those figures have risen remarkably over a short period is because people in our regional offices have been slow to come online and input the data into the databank. That is why you see a sudden increase. The fact of the matter is that we are getting a three per cent increase in notifications each year over a four-year period. That is not the kind of rise that is reflected in those statistics.

**Mr COPELAND:** Following on from that answer and the fact that you said a professional decision is made regarding the priority once the call is logged, regarding priority 1 calls, how many of those children are visited by a caseworker within two days of the call being received and being assessed as a priority 1, and how many are not met within that time frame?

**Ms SPENCE:** We actually do not collect that data centrally. As I said before, the investigation commences within 24 hours. That might mean an on-the-spot visit. That might mean we ring the child's school or kindergarten or family. There are a lot of ways that we might commence an investigation before sending the child protection workers through the door to look at the situation. So we do not collect that data, because there are a number of ways to do it.

**Mr COPELAND:** So you do not have any idea of how long it may take for a priority 1 case to be investigated?

**Ms SPENCE:** No. How wrong are you? I have said it three times. A priority 1 case is investigated within 24 hours. I will say it one more time. A priority 1 case is investigated within 24 hours. That does not mean a child protection worker walks through that door within 24 hours, because there are a number of ways a case is investigated.

**Mr COPELAND:** I will leave that then. Obviously this is a huge, huge problem. It is quite clear that the data and the numbers that have been published are either flawed or trying to be hidden. With regards to the performance bonus paid to your director-general, during Estimates Committee A the Premier said that one of the performance criteria for the DG was the timely assessment of vulnerable children. Was the Director-General of the Department of Families paid his performance bonus for meeting this criterion?

**Ms SPENCE:** I thought you would have learnt by now that the whole issue of performance bonuses is a subject for the Premier. I am not going to answer any questions on that particular issue. Indeed, I do not know about performance bonuses. That is an issue between the senior executive officer and the Premier.

**Mr COPELAND:** Given the seriousness of this—and the director-general is sitting beside you—could you ask him if he would be prepared to answer that question?

**Ms SPENCE:** Absolutely not.

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think that is an inappropriate question for this minister.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, do you feel that you have been given a hospital pass by former Minister Bligh, who has been rewarded for making such a mess of this department by getting a big promotion within your government?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not know what page of the MPS that refers to.

**Mr COPELAND:** It refers to the caseloads.

**Ms SPENCE:** But I do not believe it is a question that is appropriate for an estimates committee. I think you are way off the mark.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The member for Cunningham, the time for non-government questions has expired.

**Ms MALE:** I understand from page 1-25 of the MPS that the Department of Families administers the pensioner concession which provides a rebate on electricity costs. I am aware that the maximum level of this rebate has not increased for some years. Can the minister advise if there are any funds in this budget to increase the rate of this rebate for eligible pensioners?

**Ms SPENCE:** I can. This is good news for Queensland's pensioners because I am pleased to advise that from 1 July 2001 the Queensland government has made provision for an increase in the electricity concessions to assist pensioners and seniors in meeting their electricity costs. As you pointed out, the Department of Families administers the electricity rebate scheme. The scheme provides a rebate off the cost of domestic electricity charges to holders of a pensioner concession card and Queensland Seniors Card as well as holders of a repatriation health card for all conditions, that is the Gold Card. In the 2000-01 financial year approximately 380,300 pensioner, veteran and senior householders throughout Queensland received the electricity rebate at a cost of over \$36.22 million. This financial year the Beattie government has provided approximately \$2 million to increase the allocation of the electricity rebate scheme to over \$38 million.

I acknowledge that the domestic electricity tariff prices for non-contestable consumers have increased since 1 July and the Queensland government is fully aware of the impact on pensioners, veterans and seniors of these increases in electricity charges. Following these increases, the Queensland government raised the concession rates by six per cent to offset the increase in electricity tariff charges. The amounts paid to pensioners, veterans and seniors under the electricity rebate scheme were increased from \$8 per month to \$8.50 per month, which is a total rebate of \$102 per year.

Domestic electricity tariffs in Queensland are still amongst the lowest in Australia due mainly to the fact that electricity tariffs were frozen between 1994 and 2000. However, during that period, pensioner payments have continued to increase as payments were indexed to the CPI. The CPI takes into account, amongst other things, increases in electricity costs, including increases in other states. As you are aware, the electricity costs have increased following the introduction of the GST, and the Commonwealth government introduced a number of measures to alleviate increases attributed to the GST.

Pensions were increased and a more generous income test was allowed to enable existing pensioners to earn more before their pensions were reduced. These measures also increased the number of Queenslanders entitled to a pension and, therefore, the state's concessions. A method of calculating the GST for electricity costs was negotiated by departmental officers with other relevant departments and electricity corporations. I am pleased to inform you that, following these negotiations, it was agreed that the rebate would be applied in such a way so as to ensure the rebate's value was not reduced by the GST.

**Ms STONE:** There is a lot of community concern about the level of family violence, particularly in indigenous communities. On pages 1-3 and 1-16 of the MPS you refer to work being planned with local communities to develop responses to the report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence. Does this budget contain any new initiatives to support this important work and to help reduce the levels of family violence?

**Ms SPENCE:** I know that we all agree that the level of family violence in indigenous communities is too high. In recognition of these concerns, this budget contains an allocation of \$3 million of new money over three years specifically for domestic and family violence prevention initiatives, which is \$1 million every year. An amount of \$750,000 each year, that is three-quarters of that amount, will be allocated to services to address indigenous family violence. These funds will establish community driven counselling and healing centres. These multipurpose centres will be responsive to the specific needs of the community in which they are based. I must add that this new money is not going to capital works, because that would be capped funding under the Minister for Housing's portfolio. This is new money for workers in those centres.

I am pleased to be able to introduce this initiative in which both contemporary and traditional approaches to healing will be supported to ensure social health, counselling, and spiritual and emotional wellbeing. This immediately responds to one of the recommendations of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence report asking us to recognise and support those kinds of initiatives.

To ensure the success of this integrated initiative, the collaboration of other relevant departments such as Housing and Queensland Health has also been enlisted. The Department of Families will further ensure that the funded initiatives across the range of areas impacting on Families are integrated at the local level. This will assist in meeting the coordinated objectives of the women's task force report.

I am also pleased to advise that funds of \$250,000 per annum have been committed for the establishment of a domestic violence prevention service on the Sunshine Coast. These funds will establish a coordinated community response to address the high incidence of domestic violence in that part of the state. Planning for the allocation of these funds has already commenced, with a well attended community meeting in June 2001 which brought together people from across the Sunshine Coast to link together and form collaborative interagency links.

<sup>026</sup> **Ms NOLAN:** Page 1-15 of the MPS notes that new and upgraded supported accommodation placements have been developed for homeless young people focusing on high-need locations. Can you explain how in Brisbane this complements the extended hours services for young people?

**Ms SPENCE:** I am very pleased that the department has responded to the recommendations of the Forde inquiry regarding the establishment of youth justice outreach services operating for extended hours in high-need areas of the state. The first seven-day service will commence operating in inner Brisbane in July 2001 and will service the Brisbane City Council area. The main target of the service will be vulnerable young people aged 10 to 17 and their families. I am pleased to say that funds of \$1.261 million in a full year are allocated for the operation of this service.

The Youth and Family Support Service will provide best practice early intervention and diversion centres and services to young people at risk and their

families. It will also assist families and young people respond to clients, ensure young people at risk of harm have an appropriate service response and divert young people at risk of offending from further involvement in the youth justice system. These outcomes are achieved through close liaison with police, other agencies and by individual and family case work. Where necessary, the Youth and Family Support Service will use the youth crisis accommodation system. Funding of \$940,000 was announced in last year's budget for new and enhanced support accommodation services for young people at risk, which will complement the work of the Youth and Family Support Service.

In May of this year I approved triennial funding of \$400,000 a year to the Carina Youth Agency to provide integrated accommodation in outreach intensive support services for 15 to 18 years olds. This service will provide long-term fully supported accommodation with 24 hour on-site support for up to six homeless and at risk young people. A further 40 young people will receive outreach support. The Carina Youth Agency is currently working with a steering committee of other youth agencies and departmental staff to develop the support model. It is expected that the Carina Youth Agency will have accessed suitable property for the 24-hour accommodation component of the service and be providing outreach services by September this year.

While these two services will be providing a different range of supports to young people and their families, I expect that they will liaise closely as part of the Brisbane Youth Service system. There will be times when young people could be receiving support from both services to assist in the development of long-term support options when return to the family home is not possible. So they are two good initiatives. We should see the results of them later this year.

**Ms MALE:** The first annual progress report on Our Shared Future: Queensland's Framework for Ageing 2000-04 as referred to at page 1-14 of the MPS, which is the state government's plan to respond to the needs of older Queenslanders, has been completed. Can you indicate what, if any, progress has been made in implementing the recommendations?

**Ms SPENCE:** The strategic plan, Our Shared Future, to which you refer plans to address the needs of older Queenslanders and incorporates a policy and planning framework and a total of 171 strategies across 25 state government departments and agencies. The strategies are grouped under key areas for action. The Department of Families through the Ageing Branch is currently preparing the next progress report on Our Shared Future. This report will document progress on the implementation of each strategy, include new strategies that have been added over the past 12 months and use case studies to illustrate how particular strategies are making a real difference to the lives of older Queenslanders.

Some of the money that has been allocated to these strategies includes providing a recurrent allocation of \$1.333 million and non-recurrent allocation of \$105,000 to community organisations to provide services to older people during 2000-01. This funding assists community organisations to address issues such as socialisation, isolation and the abuse of older people. In addition to maintaining existing services, funding has also been provided to establish six new services throughout Queensland. We also have a ministerial council for older persons. We have contributed \$50,000 in recurrent funding to the operation of the Centre for Human Ageing at the University of Queensland. We are looking forward to addressing the issues raised in our strategic plan, Our Shared Future.

**Ms STONE:** I refer the minister to page 1-14 of the MPS. The International Year of the Volunteer has so far been very successful and very warmly received by the general public and the volunteering community. Can you outline some of the work done by the lead agency, the Department of Families, which contributed to this success?

**Ms SPENCE:** Earlier this year I approved \$300,000 in grants to 55 organisations in Queensland. This month I approved \$200,000 in grants to 51 organisations in Queensland. You should have received information about that last week or this week. As well, we have allocated \$200,000 to Volunteering Queensland, which is coordinating the community sector's response to the International Year of the Volunteer. I know that all state members of parliament are going through the process of honouring the volunteers in their own electorates by providing them with medallions and certificates.

The International Year of the Volunteer has been conducting a very good marketing campaign with the 'I volunteer' slogan. There have been billboards and community service announcements. I think it has so far captured the attention of the people throughout the state. The International Year of the Volunteer is more than just rewarding people, which is, I guess, what we as members of parliament want to do. That is certainly very important. We hope that as a long lasting legacy from the International Year of the Volunteer some very important information and data can be collected about volunteering in this state. I think that will be one of the ongoing legacies of this year, if we can collect some real information and do some real research into volunteering needs and gaps in this state. I think we need to build more accurate profiles of volunteers and the work that they do.

We hear all the time that young people do not volunteer. We need to get the message out that that is not true. They are out there volunteering. It is just that they are volunteering in a different way to older people. We need to encourage young people—the people of the future—into volunteering in areas that they most want to be involved with. There are many aims of this year. I am pleased that the Queensland government through the Department of Families has contributed to the success of the International Year of the Volunteer.

**Ms NOLAN:** I note from page 1-22 of the MPS that funds of \$300,000 over three years are provided for anti-graffiti measures. I know that many communities and local councils are very concerned about the damage caused by graffiti. What plans does the Families Department have for these funds? What are some of the possible innovative approaches that might be adopted to reduce the spread of graffiti in the community?

**Ms SPENCE:** I know from my experience as a member of parliament that graffiti is a cause of fear and crime in the general community and the suburbs, especially amongst the elderly. I am sure that that is the case in regional and rural Queensland as well. It certainly diminishes the quality of the environment in which we live. The removal of graffiti causes significant problems for our local community. We believe that graffiti is best addressed by implementing strategies at a local level and trying to prevent its occurrence. That is why this year we have allocated funds to work with community-based organisations and local government authorities to develop and implement a range of innovative responses that will ensure that the funding provided in the budget is allocated more effectively.

The responses may include funding for community organisations to purchase supplies for rapid removal teams, development of legal street art programs for

young graffitists, education programs in communities to harden graffiti targets and council sponsored clean-ups and awareness campaigns. At the moment we are talking to the Local Government Association, the Queensland Police Service, the Crime Prevention Unit and Queensland Rail. We are looking forward to developing criteria and guidelines for local community groups in accessing this money.

**Ms MALE:** The Premier and you as minister last week officially opened the new Brisbane Youth Detention Centre at Wacol, and I refer to page 1-20 of the MPS. Could you indicate the cost of the new facility and what benefits this government believes will result from taking a new direction in dealing with young people who are in conflict with the law?

**Ms SPENCE:** The total capital budget for the new centre was approximately \$42.7 million, with \$35.7 million spent on construction work. Approximately \$7 million was spent on design, engineering and technical advice and the purchase of the land and public art in accordance with government policy. The centre has an optimum operating capacity of 86 and a built capacity of 102. There are plans to allow the construction of an additional 24-bed unit should we desire. The centre's philosophy is based on the principle of holding young people accountable for their actions, protecting the community and providing young people's rehabilitation. As the Premier said at the opening of the detention centre, the centre is not a holiday resort. It has a very secure perimeter and a range of external and internal cameras to assist with the internal security of the centre. Room fittings are functional but relatively spartan.

Although we opened the centre just last week, it has in fact had residents since early February this year. The juvenile justice section of the department proudly tells me that in the last 12 months we have not had one escape from a youth detention centre in this state. We should touch wood when we say those sorts of things in this business, but this is the first time in Queensland's history we have ever been able to say that. We believe this detention centre is secure, but it is also about providing a new direction for young people who go there and giving them a second chance in life.

That is why the centre has some excellent educational programs. It was built to TAFE standards. We want to make sure that the young people who enter this place gain some training and an education and leave with better life and job skills than when they entered. It is well known that young people who have viable employment options are less likely to reoffend in the future. I am very confident of the facility. It also provides its own nursing services. Negotiations are being finalised with Queensland Health for the roll-out of a comprehensive health service, with an additional \$1 million in recurrent funding for the Brisbane and Cleveland youth detention centres.

**Ms NOLAN:** I understand that the Families Department has a lead role in community disaster recovery. I refer to the financial statements at page 1-32 of the MPS. We often hear on the news when natural disasters have occurred how staff from the Families Department are very quickly on the spot to assist individuals, families and communities. Can you advise the committee what provision is made in the budget for community disaster recovery and explain some of the major achievements of this activity in the last financial year?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, and I am sure that not too many people know that the Department of Families is indeed a lead agency in community recovery from disaster within the total Queensland disaster management plan. In this role, the

department provides personal support services, information, emergency financial relief and referral to counselling and other specialist services for affected communities. The department aims to lead and coordinate community agencies to reduce the disaster related social and family dislocation, as well as emotional and psychological effects following a disaster.

Last year the department made some 478 payments at a total cost of \$350,000 to people who were eligible for this type of disaster relief. The department has a designated state disaster recovery coordinator who works with regional staff to ensure a state of preparedness and a capacity to respond immediately to assist individuals and families following a disaster event. The department's natural disaster relief scheme assists non-profit organisations such as sporting groups to repair or replace facilities damaged or lost as a result of natural disasters. During the last financial year, \$33,000 was paid out under this scheme. I am pleased to say that there were a significant number of achievements in disaster recoveries in the last year, including central Queensland coast flooding in November 2000, west Queensland flooding in November and January 2001, Toowoomba district storms in January 2001 and tropical cyclone Abigail in February 2001. As a key agency involved in state disaster management, staff of the Department of Families were on call on a 24-hour alert and were involved in those disasters.

I am not sure that we should talk about them as a significant number of achievements, but it is good to know that Department of Families officers are out there ready to assist families when a disaster is occurring. They were very active in March this year after the Brisbane floods. Some 66 departmental staff were out there knocking on doors, asking families what kind of assistance they needed. It was a terrific effort.

<sup>027</sup> **The CHAIRMAN:** The portion of time for government members' questions has expired. I call the member for Cunningham.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I want to continue with the issue of staffing levels and the workload that is being expected of those staff. Given the reports of the surveys of workplace practices in the offices at Logan, Mount Isa and Bundaberg, do you have reports on other offices? If so, could you table that information?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will ask my director-general to answer that question.

**Mr PEACH:** There are five other area office reports, as well as the three that were referred to specifically, I think, in that newspaper report.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, would you be willing to table those reports for the information of the committee?

**Ms SPENCE:** No. They are at present part of the cabinet submission. I think it is appropriate that cabinet deliberate on these reports. We as a cabinet will make a decision about whether to release them.

**Mr COPELAND:** Can you indicate that there are findings in those reports that are just as bad as those in the reports that were released for Logan, Mount Isa and Bundaberg?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I do not think they are quite as exciting to you or the media as the Logan and Gold Coast reports. Frankly, the Logan and Gold Coast offices are the two offices in the state with the highest workloads, so you will not find the same level of titillation in the Mount Isa report, for example.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, do you have any records of how many calls are made to the Children's Commissioner with complaints regarding Families Department response times?

**Ms SPENCE:** You would have to ask the Children's Commission for that information. We do not keep it.

**Mr COPELAND:** I believe that there are some very real problems in your department. The main recommendation of the Forde inquiry, to which you referred earlier, was to increase funding for child protection by \$103 million per year. In 1999-2000 funding was \$93 million short of that recommendation, in 2001-01 it was \$83 million short and in 2001-02 it will be \$73 million short—and that is without any indexation of the \$103 million figure. Could you advise whether your government will in fact implement fully the recommendation of the Forde inquiry and allocate \$103 million per year to alleviate some of the problems your department is currently experiencing?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is certainly this government's intention to increase the budget of the Department of Families each year, specifically the budget that is allocated to child protection. We are not backward in telling you how much we have increased that budget over the last three years, and we are committed to ensuring that we increase the budget for child protection in future years. Yes, I would like to see us reach the target set by Leneen Forde, and we have a systematic program of increasing the budget for child protection each year.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, given that it is \$250 million short already, with your track record of yearly increases that target will not actually be achieved until 2009-10, without any indexation of the \$103 million figure. Given the very real problems that exist in your department, do you not think there should be a much greater focus on meeting the commitment your government has given to implement that and the other recommendations of the Forde inquiry?

**Ms SPENCE:** We have given the commitment to increase the budget by \$100 million over four years. What we know is that next year's budget for child protection will have recurrent funding of over \$40 million more than it had four years ago. I do not agree with your assumption that we are going to increase it by only \$10 million thereafter. We have not made any commitment as to how we will increase the budget after next year. We gave a four-year commitment—\$100 million over four years. That will certainly be a subject for the government to consider in the formulation of future budgets. Indeed, one of the reasons I am taking a submission to cabinet on these issues is to fully inform my cabinet colleagues about the issues concerning child protection workloads.

I think it is reasonable for any of us to ask the question. When I first became the minister I was very interested in why, when we have put on an additional 154 new staff in the department over a two-year period—that is front-line child protection staff—the caseload had not decreased at all. I think it is fair that we ask ourselves questions about what is happening there. That is why we are deliberating about these issues as a cabinet.

**Mr COPELAND:** The recommendation was for an increase of \$103 million recurrent, specifically for child protection. This year it is \$73 million short. As I said earlier, it will be 2009-10 before there is \$100 million in recurrent funding, given your government's performance since 1999. Why, given that very clear shortfall, does the MPS on page 1-2 quite falsely say that you are meeting the recommendations of the Forde inquiry? It is point 1 under 'Child Protection Reform'?



**Ms SPENCE:** Point 1 states—

The 1999-2000 State Budget committed recurrent funds of \$10 million increasing to \$40 million in 2002-03 to meet the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (Forde Inquiry).

Is that what you are referring to?

**Mr COPELAND:** That is correct. Quite clearly it is not meeting the recommendations, given that the recommendation was for \$103 million. It is a significant change in the language from last year's MPS, where it stated that the department was progressing the recommendations of Forde.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think you are playing with semantics there. We have stated unequivocally for three years now how we are going to work towards meeting the recommendations of the Forde inquiry. The language has not changed. We have not changed our commitment in this area. We are continuing to put more money into our budget for child protection. We acknowledge the recommendations of the Forde inquiry, and that is why we have increased our efforts in this regard.

On another note, we put \$1 million into the Forde Foundation initially. As part of the election commitments we have delivered an additional \$1 million into the Forde Foundation. We are delivering a number of other measures, obviously, to meet the recommendations of the Forde inquiry.

I think I said before that there were 42 recommendations in the Forde report. The recommendation to which you refer is only one of those recommendations. We have the Forde Monitoring Committee, which is an independent committee, which will be judging this department and this government on how well we have gone in meeting the recommendations of Forde. I expect the final report from the Forde Monitoring Committee in August. I meet with the chair of that committee on a frequent basis. It is scrutinising every aspect of the Department of Families to see how we are performing in meeting those recommendations.

This inquiry was not just about child protection and it was not just about money. There were 42 recommendations which require an overhaul in the practices in the Department of Families and we have been working very hard, with the monitoring committee and other agencies, to ensure we improve our practices in a number of areas. Opening the new Brisbane Youth Detention Centre was a result of one of those recommendations. Closing Sir Leslie Wilson was another result of those recommendations. Having reconciliation meetings with the former victims of children's institutions was another recommendation we have been going through. There are 42 of them and we have progressively been going through and meeting our commitment to those recommendations.

As I said, the Forde Monitoring Committee will report next month. I am sure that it will have a number of areas in which to give us some good advice about how we could improve our performance. I look forward to the report. Money was one issue of that inquiry. There are many other issues. The department has I think shown a very firm resolve to implement those recommendations.

**Mr COPELAND:** I acknowledge that there are wide-ranging recommendations in that report. However, this particular point refers specifically to child protection reform. It quite clearly states '\$10 million increasing to \$40 million to 2002-03 to meet the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions'. Quite clearly, this year you are \$73 million short of that. Do you acknowledge that that is in fact a false statement and you are not meeting that recommendation?

**Ms SPENCE:** I absolutely do not acknowledge that this is a false statement. The statement to which you refer—I will read it again—says—

The 1999-2000 State Budget committed recurrent funds of \$10 million increasing to \$40 million by 2002-03 to meet the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions.

**Mr COPELAND:** Do you agree that that recommendation was for \$103 million per year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I agree with that.

**Mr COPELAND:** Do you agree that this year it is \$30 million? Next year it will be \$40 million. That is significantly less than the \$103 million, so you have not met that recommendation as it is stated you have in fact done.

**Ms SPENCE:** We are meeting that recommendation. I have said to you that it will take some time to fully meet that recommendation, but we are on the path to meeting that recommendation. I suggest to the member for Cunningham that all he is doing is playing with words at the moment; we are really not advancing child protection in this state at this time with this line of questioning.

**Mr COPELAND:** It is highlighting the fact that your government has made a commitment that you have not delivered on. Between last year's MPS and this year's MPS there has been a significant change in the language which unfortunately leads people who are cynical, like me, to think that you probably will not meet that \$103 million recommendation.

**Ms SPENCE:** I am happy to answer that question. Today I am pleased to note—it is a pleasure to note this—that the new National Party member of parliament is so interested in language. From my 12 years of observation of National Party members in this parliament I note that very few of them have been so concerned about language in the past. They were not prepared, for example, to say sorry to the stolen generation. They have been prepared to call women by various names in the chamber. In fact, one thing I have observed about National Party members in the chamber in the past is how little they concern themselves with language. It is pleasing to see that the member for Cunningham is going to be a stickler—

**Mr ROWELL:** Can I make a comment?

**Ms SPENCE:** No, I am using my three minutes. It is pleasing to see that he is going to be a stickler for political correctness and concerned for language. I join him in that concern and I am happy to have that debate at any time.

**Mr COPELAND:** I thank you for the compliment, Minister. I will be certainly looking out for the language that is being used, when it is quite clearly a false statement. Minister, can you confirm if a request has been issued by the director-general to front-line staff working in the department to stop industrial action because it is embarrassing to the director-general and to yourself when they have quite clear concerns about the workloads that are facing them?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think the director-general would like to answer that one himself.

**Mr PEACH:** No, I have not issued such a direction in writing or verbally. The department currently has been engaging in a range of activities and negotiations with the union. This has been going on over the period of the industrial dispute. We have in recent times had a very good collaborative two-day workshop with the union to work through some issues. We had another meeting that went on for two days, working through some issues last week. The union is currently considering

whether the range of issues that the department has put on the table are enough to allow them to recommend lifting the bans, and we are waiting to see what happens. But I can assure you I have not issued any directives.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, also identified in the Forde report was the need for improved youth detention centres, as you highlighted earlier. I refer to page 1-27 and construction of youth detention centres. Could you specify the original budget for the refurbishment of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre and the current estimated cost? Unfortunately, it is not broken down as a line item within the budget papers.

**Ms SPENCE:** I might call forward our director of youth justice services, Steve Armitage, to answer that question. I know that he carries that level of detail around with him.

**Mr ARMITAGE:** As of April 2001, the rebuilding refurbishment of the Cleveland Youth Detention Centre was \$19.43 million.

**Mr COPELAND:** Was that the estimated completed cost?

**Mr ARMITAGE:** That is the estimated completed cost as of April 2001.

**Mr COPELAND:** Can I ask what the original budgeted cost was when it was originally put in the budget papers? I could not find that detail.

**Mr ARMITAGE:** I would have to refer to the MPS papers, if you would bear with me.

**Mr COPELAND:** Yes, fine.

**Mr ARMITAGE:** I think I will need to get that. It is not in these papers. I will need to come back to the committee with that information.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, could I also request—if we are getting that information back—that the youth detention centres line item could be broken down by particular youth centre, the original budgeted cost and the expected completed cost, not only for Cleveland but for all of the ones that are covered by that point?

**Ms SPENCE:** We have only got Cleveland. That is it.

**Mr COPELAND:** And the new detention centre.

**Ms SPENCE:** We will have to take that one on notice.

**Mr COPELAND:** That is fine. Cleveland was due to be completed by June 2001. It will not be completed by that date. When is the current expected completion date?

**Ms SPENCE:** It is 70 per cent complete now, and it is expected to be completed in September.

**Mr COPELAND:** Completed by September?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes.

**Mr COPELAND:** On page 1-16 of the MPS you refer to the exposure draft of the domestic violence legislation amendment bill, which has been released for community comment. While we join with you and abhor the incidence of domestic violence in our community and we must do everything we possibly can and muster our resources to stamp it out, there is some evidence of abuse of DVOs by some lawyers. How do you propose to address this problem while still providing protection to those people who are in very real need of it?

**Ms SPENCE:** I really have to say, Madam Chair, that I do not understand the member's question. I do not know what he means by abuse of domestic violence orders by some lawyers. Frankly, I have never heard of that occurring. I am not sure that this question is particularly relevant to the MPS, anyway. It is public knowledge that the domestic violence legislation is draft legislation. It is out there for public consultation. I am very happy to give the member for Cunningham a briefing and make my departmental officers available for a briefing on that particular legislation. I mean, it is a big piece of legislation. It is a complete rewrite, and I think that those particular issues are important. I am happy to discuss them with you, but I think it might be better in a briefing session rather than to try to get to the real issue in a three-minute answer.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thanks, Minister. I will take you up on that offer. On page 1-16 of the MPS under the heading of Future Developments it says that—

The Office of Domestic Violence Prevention is funded to the extent of \$3 million over three years for new/enhanced community-based services to respond to, and prevent, family violence.

It is detailed that \$0.25 million of this is to be provided to services on the Sunshine Coast and the remainder to indigenous family violence. I commend the government on that level of funding but would like to know: is there funding available for other areas of the state not detailed on those two points?

**Ms SPENCE:** I do not have that page in front of me. It should not say \$2.5 million to the Sunshine Coast.

**Mr COPELAND:** \$0.25 million.

**Ms SPENCE:** That is new money to establish a new service on the Sunshine Coast. As I said before, the rest of that money has been earmarked to deal with indigenous family violence issues. Certainly we would hope to sponsor new services throughout Queensland in the years ahead. But this is our commitment to this specific new service on the Sunshine Coast in this year's budget.

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

**Ms STONE:** Minister, I would also like to ask a question regarding the Forde inquiry. I understand that the department has put in place a number of strategies which respond to the recommendations of the Forde commission of inquiry into the abuse of children in Queensland institutions. I particularly refer to page 1-8 of the MPS. Many of these strategies are aimed at reforming the way that child protection is carried out in the future. I have noted that, in your earlier answers, you have spoken on some of these strategies. But can you tell us what your department is doing for victims of past abuse and how we are supporting these people?

**Ms SPENCE:** As I mentioned before, the government initially allocated \$1 million of funds to establish the Forde Foundation. And as a result of this year's budget, a further \$1 million contribution has been added to the Forde Foundation. The income generated from the capital is distributed to former residents who make application for funding of activities which they see as adding value to their lives. These decisions are not made by me or the department. We have a board, the Forde Foundation Board, which receives those applications and makes decisions about allocations to former residents. As well, the department funds the Aftercare Resource Centre, which commenced operation in October 1999 and provides counselling and support services to former residents living across Australia. A nationwide service is made possible through the provision of flexible brokerage

dollars, allowing former residents to purchase counselling and support services in their local area.

The department has established a team dedicated to assisting former residents access information about their childhood, including their records through the freedom of information branch. Advocacy and support services are provided to former residents also through the Esther Trust. The department operates a toll-free number which links former residents to a dedicated officer who is able to advise them of the services available to them. A quarterly newsletter is produced by departmental staff to advise former residents of the implementation of the Forde inquiry recommendations and the new services that are available to them. The department's latest support project, which is being progressed in collaboration with former residents, is a funded peer support service, and this project aims to support former residents help each other while gaining useful skills for themselves.

In addition to those, we have held a number of reconciliation events in the past few months with former residents. We had a very large event in the City Hall to mark the second anniversary of the tabling of the Forde commission of inquiry report. We have had reconciliation events occur at Sir Leslie Wilson and Tara in Townsville. We plan to hold other reconciliation events for those residents in the future.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, can you explain at what stage the process is in transferring the responsibility for the Community Services Strategy, referred to at MPS page 1-2, from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to the Department of Families?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. This was transferred to the Department of Families as part of the machinery of government changes gazetted on 22 February this year. The three key elements of the Community Services Strategy are the statement of partnership between government and community services; development of an industry plan for the community services sector; and improvement of funding in grants administration.

Prior to 22 February, the department's focus was on the third of these elements, which specifically meant reforming its own funding programs and participating in a single service agreement pilot. The funding reform work completed by the department in 2000-01 was concentrated on the development of a generic funding agreement, service plans and standard conditions of funding. Part of the funding reform is for the department to have a funding agreement with every organisation that it funds. Consequently, any service provider approved to receive new recurrent funding must now sign a funding agreement and service plan before funding is approved. The department advised that in June last year all service providers who were in receipt of existing recurrent funding were required to have a funding agreement and service plan signed before June 2001. Most service providers have complied with this requirement. However, for the small number that have not done so, funding will not be provided unless these documents are signed.

When the Community Services Strategy was transferred from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet to the Department of Families, non-recurrent funds of \$171,000 were also transferred, including \$100,000 earmarked for a consultant to develop the above industry plan. The consultancy was recently advertised, and I understand that the closing date for applications is later this month. The consultant is due to present the interim findings in November this year and complete the industry plan by February next year.

**Ms MALE:** Minister, I note from page 1-3 of the MPS that funds are provided in this budget for two new youth justice services at Maryborough/Hervey Bay and

Caboolture/Redcliffe. The MPS states that these services will build on the successful model of youth justice services currently in operation in Logan, Ipswich and Townsville. Can the minister outline how these services operate and explain what are some of the benefits that they have delivered?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, these youth justice services are the first service delivery units dedicated to supervising young offenders in the community, and providing a balance between having young people accept responsibility for their actions while providing them with real opportunities to make a positive contribution to the community. The justice services function as a hub for the delivery of a range of programs and services specifically tailored for young people subject to youth justice orders. The type of programs and services provided include counselling services, group-based programs, work-based projects, community projects and educational and vocational services. A number of encouraging trends have been identified as the services have been comprehensively evaluated over the first two years of their operation.

Prior to the establishment of the youth justice services, the catchment area for the services accounted for 22 per cent of the state's total of young people on supervised youth justice orders. This percentage has since fallen to approximately 18 per cent of the state total in January this year, and the number of young people on supervised juvenile justice orders in the areas covered by the existing youth justice services has decreased at a significantly higher rate than in other parts of the state.

<sup>029</sup> We are pleased with the operation of our existing youth justice services and I look forward with confidence to the two new services announced in this year's budget, delivering as they do to the Maryborough-Hervey Bay and the Caboolture and Redcliffe areas. While I have another minute, I just thought that I might mention to members a very interesting statistic that I picked up last week—and I hope that I get it right, Steve; you will have to correct me if I do not. In researching the number of young people going into the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, it seems that only one per cent of Queensland's young people have formal contact with the court. One per cent of Queensland's juveniles ever appear before court. I think that is a little-known statistic out there in the general population and I share it with members of parliament because they might like to use it around their neighbourhood watches out there. I think that the impression out there among older Queenslanders is that there is an enormous amount of youth crime. The fact that we are looking at one per cent of our young people who ever come to court is quite a sobering statistic. Of that one per cent, it is likely that 70 per cent will never reoffend. So we are looking at only a very, very small percentage of young people who are going to ever reoffend after coming into contact with the court system.

What we aim for as a government is establishing youth justice services like this throughout the state to make sure that young people reduce their contact with the formal criminal justice system. We believe, obviously, that attacking the causes of crime is more important, but when young people get into trouble we would rather see them dealt with in this way than through the courts or indeed through detention centres.

**Ms NOLAN:** I refer you to page 1-4 of the MPS, which again touches on youth crime. Can you explain the recent trends in youth crime in Queensland? Can you tell us whether you believe that any strategies put in place by this government have contributed to a decrease in the rates of youth crime?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think that I might have just answered that one. Let me talk a bit more about youth crime, because it is an important area. As I said, we really do have to start getting youth crime into perspective. The good news story is that the level of offending behaviour on some indices has decreased in this state. It is difficult to determine the changes in offending behaviour in terms of seriousness of offences. However, a reasonably reliable indicator is the sentencing patterns of the courts. During the past few years, the number of finalised court appearances which resulted in a child being placed on a supervised order decreased from 3,040 to 2,873, which was a decrease of 5.5 per cent. This indicates that the offences dealt with by the courts are generally not of a more serious nature than in previous years. This is also borne out by the fact that the number of children on detention orders as at 30 June decreased from 79 in 1998 to 60 in 2000—a decrease of 24 per cent.

Overall, the number of young people subject to supervised court orders declined from a peak of 2,178 in September 1999 to 1,968 as of March 2001—a decrease of 9.6 per cent. So on our measures we are seeing a decrease in the number of young people committing crimes and the seriousness of their crimes. It is interesting to note that for just about—I think—every month of this year we have had the lowest number of young people in our youth detention centres than for some time in this state. We are averaging about only 100 young people in those two detention centres, Cleveland and Brisbane, at any one time in any month this year. That is far fewer than we have had in the past, when we might have seen an average more likely to be 140. So we are seeing a decline in the number of children in our detention centres, a decline in the seriousness of offences and, in fact, a decline in the levels of juvenile crime.

**The CHAIRMAN:** That is very good news.

**Ms SPENCE:** It is. We need some good news.

**Ms MALE:** Could you please explain the proposed child-care legislative reform process referred to in the MPS at page 1-10?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. It is proposed that key new directions in the regulatory framework will be the introduction of performance-based standards, the regulation of outside school hours care through a system of licensing, and the introduction of a minimum qualification for assistance. It is estimated that the cost of bringing the outside school hours care up to licensing standards will be over \$4 million and the cost of introducing a minimum qualification in upgrading qualifications will be approximately \$4.2 million. These costs are included in the budget commitment to spend \$12 million over three years in child care. So there is good news ahead for those in the child-care sector.

I have to say that the department has done a very good job in consulting with the child-care sector about the legislative reform process and the new strategic plan that we are looking at. There were some concerns in the sector, I think, about upgrading the qualifications of their assistants, but I think that most of the sector wants to see the child-care industry become more professional and they know that this comes at a cost. They are very pleased that the government has committed money to funding and training in this particular area.

The Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel is currently preparing an exposure draft of the new legislation. It is anticipated that the child-care branch will commence statewide consultations with the child-care sector on the exposure draft in approximately August or September this year. We know that the child-care industry in this state is a diverse and fragmented sector. That is why drafting this

legislation has been quite a complex process. We do not want to be under any illusion that introducing and regulating types of care that have not been previously regulated in this state, such as after school hours care, is easy, but I think that most people in the child-care sector understand that this is long overdue. They have indicated satisfaction with the progression of this new legislation and the direction that we are heading down.

**Ms STONE:** Minister, I refer to page 1-9 of the MPS. Could you please explain some of the achievements that have been made in child care?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes. There are over 20,000 workers currently employed in the child-care industry and nearly half a million children attend formal child-care services in Queensland in a range of different care situations. Last year the budget totalled \$996,920, which was allocated to 14 child-care and family support hubs to provide a range of child-care and family support services to communities in rural and urban locations around the state.

Construction commenced at the Warrgoobulginda child-care and family support hub at Doomadgee at a cost of over \$1 million. The Department of Families provided \$645,000; the Commonwealth government, \$405,000. This facility is expected to be completed this month and will provide long-day care, play groups, outside school hours care, family support, child protection services, parent education, a community meeting place and a work space for visiting specialists.

I think that these new child protection hubs are the direction that we are heading in the future. Capital funding of \$100,000 and operational funding of \$100,000 were also approved for a service in Longreach for a mobile child-care service to provide limited hours care services in four rural towns, including Muttaborra, Aramac, Isisford, and Ilfracombe. An allocation of \$1.8 million in capital funding was made under the child infrastructure support initiative to enable 78 child-care services to upgrade their facilities. Funds of \$91,000 were provided to nine additional services to address urgent health and safety maintenance issues. There was the approval of non-recurrent funding of \$315,000 to 30 limited-hour care services that are experiencing financial viability problems due to the fluctuating child-care needs of families living in rural communities. There was the development of a CD-ROM information technology training resource to respond to the child-care industry needs for IT training. That CD-ROM was developed at a cost of \$295,000 and will be distributed to over 2,000 child-care services later this month. We have introduced an amendment to the Child Care Act in January this year to make provision for independent home-based care. The amendment sets out standards for this care where children are cared for on a regular basis in homes for reward. As well, we are working through the preparation for the child care bill.

So I think that there has been a lot of activity in the Office of Child Care in the Department of Families. I think that, through the funding levels that I have just talked about here today in some small level of detail, shows how the Beattie government is committed to ensuring that our child-care sector is brought up to date, that the infrastructure is brought into the new century and that we continue to provide funding for child-care services, particularly in rural and regional Queensland—and that is where they are—who are mostly experiencing viability issues because of the shortfall in the number of children in those centres.

**Ms NOLAN:** Minister, I refer you to page 1-21 of the MPS. Could you tell us the level of satisfaction that victims of crime who have participated in the community conferencing program have expressed?



**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, the community conference provides an alternative to a Children's Court appearance—bringing young offenders face to face with the victims of their offence to make reparation. Accredited conveners assist the parties to discuss the impact of the offence and negotiate an agreement to repair the harm.

Over 90 per cent of victims who participate in conferences are satisfied with their progress. I think that 90 per cent is a creditable amount. Community conferencing for juvenile offenders was formally introduced into Queensland in 1996. Conferencing started in south-east Queensland in 1997 and became available in far-north Queensland in 1999 as an initiative of the Beattie government. On 1 April this year the conferencing services were integrated into the regional infrastructure of the department. Two conferencing coordinators have been employed: one operating from the Ipswich and Logan region and one from the Brisbane city region. The existing service delivery locations have been maintained from these regions.

Conferencing currently uses 10 full-time employees and has an annual budget of \$0.9 million. Conferencing is available as an option for 49.8 per cent of the state's young offenders. Referrals to community conferencing have increased by 69 per cent from the period of April to June this year compared to the same period last year. We are committed to the statewide provision of community conferencing. That was an election commitment and we expect to see some increase in the community conferencing provision as a result of this year's budget.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Government members' time has expired. I call the member for Cunningham.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, I refer to page 1-12 of the MPS regarding the target percentage of licensed child-care services which receive at least two resourcing contact visits per annum. This is currently at 85 per cent at both target and actual. I would have thought that a target of 100 per cent would have been appropriate for that particular line item. How do you ensure that the 15 per cent that were not visited last year are, in fact, visited this year?

**Ms SPENCE:** I think it is a fair question. While we are waiting for the deputy to tell us why we cannot aim for 100 per cent, I have to say that many of the private child care providers who have come to see me have complained that we visit them too much. In fact, some of them complain that we are there every month.

It is intended that all licensed child care services receive at least one contact visit per year. Over the previous 12 months, the department collected data on visits to licensed child care services. Information recorded indicates that over 98 per cent of licensed child care services have received at least one contact visit since June last year. Of the 11 services that were not visited, these have all received telephone contact. Many of these services are located in rural and remote communities. Regional staff are now endeavouring to ensure that services that were not visited receive a contact visit within the next month as a priority. It still does not answer your question, does it?

**Mr COPELAND:** I would have thought that 100 per cent is probably still a good target to have. I should say I do agree with your comments regarding not enough good news stories about the young people and that the people who do appear in the justice system are not indicative of the wider community in terms of our young people. On page 1-16 of the MPS under the heading Future Developments, it is stated that there will be two projects funded under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, one being to establish and support groups for older men in three regional

locations in Queensland. Why is it only aimed at three regional locations, which areas are they and how were they targeted?

**Ms SPENCE:** I will ask Andrew Davis, the Executive Director of Children, Families and Young People, to answer that question.

**Mr DAVIS:** In 1999 the Office of Aging produced a report called *The Hidden Problem—Suicide in older men in Queensland*. The findings of the report formed the basis of two applications that were made to the ageing branch of the Department of Health and Aged Care in 2000 for funding under the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. Non-recurrent funds of \$196,000 have been granted to the department through the ageing branch to undertake two 12-month projects targeting older men.

The first project, 'Prevention is the only cure—Raising awareness to prevent suicide among older men', aims to raise awareness about the nature and extent of suicide by men over the age of 65 years, and an amount of about \$60,000 has been made available to conduct this project. The target group for this project is people who have regular contact with older men. An awareness of the issue, the risk factors and the ways of responding to people who express suicidal thoughts will assist people to identify and relate to older men who may be suicidal. An awareness-raising presentation has been piloted for this project and is currently being revised in order to more effectively reach the target audience. Work is also under way to recruit and train regional presenters.

A second project 'Prevention is the only cure—Older men's groups' aims to enhance older men's social network and addresses risk factors for suicide by older men. This project will establish a minimum of three groups especially for older men in Hervey Bay, Toowoomba and the Gold Coast. The groups will provide the members with a source of friendship, a sense of belonging and social network. Research shows that it is through doing things together that men form relationships and feel comfortable talking about their feelings and concerns. This helps to prevent depression and suicide. The groups will also link the members to other services for older men and mental health services where necessary, and project officers will establish the groups and encourage them to be self-supporting by the end of project.

An amount of \$136,743 has been made available to implement this project. Regional work auspiced by local community organisations in one of each of the three locations started work in May. They are currently engaged in project planning, meeting local stakeholders and establishing local advisory groups for the project.

**Ms SPENCE:** To answer your question, 'Why not more?', this is all we have been funded for by the Commonwealth.

**Mr COPELAND:** One point was: why those three areas, Toowoomba, Hervey Bay and the Gold Coast?

**Ms SPENCE:** Why did they choose them, Andrew?

**Mr COPELAND:** I am delighted that one is Toowoomba.

**Mr DAVIS:** Those particular areas were chosen because of the regional and metropolitan balance, and because they were areas that were considered to be important target areas.

**Ms SPENCE:** And probably because they applied.

**Mr COPELAND:** Minister, regarding 1-11 where you mention the Adoptions Branch, you have said on the public record a number of times that the current adoption legislation is out of date. Do you have a time line for a review of this legislation and do you envisage that it will address the problems some people are currently experiencing with the adoption process, both locally and internationally?

**Ms SPENCE:** Yes, we do have a bit of a time line. I know that we have a time line, because I have sat down with the department to talk about this, but I have not been to cabinet with the issues so it would be premature for me to talk about it until that happens.

**Mr COPELAND:** Would you expect this year or next year perhaps?

**Ms SPENCE:** We have appointed a project officer specifically for this and a project plan is under way. We are working our way into cabinet and, yes, things will start.

**Mr COPELAND:** On page 1-18 of the MPS under Recent Achievements, you state that your department's Sexual Abuse Counselling Service has developed and implemented therapeutic services for children under 10 years of age who have been sexually abused. What form do the services take and what areas are these services offered in?

**Ms SPENCE:** We might ask Majella Ryan from the department to answer that question.

**Ms RYAN:** The Sexual Abuse Counselling Service is a service that is located at Woolloongabba. It provides direct therapeutic services. In the year 2000 it introduced services for children under 10. Those services are provided directly at the centre in terms of children coming to the centre and receiving counselling, assessment and therapeutic services. In addition to that, the service provides a consultancy service and advisory services on a statewide basis to both FSOs and community organisations. The consultancy service actually assists practitioners throughout the state to work with children under 10. This is a service that was not previously supplied before. It is a real innovation and advance forward in our work with children who have experienced sexual abuse.

**Mr COPELAND:** Thank you.

**Ms SPENCE:** I think the answer is, from my understanding, that the consultants at that service will train other counsellors in other parts of the state so that, in fact, the service is going to be offered on the Gold Coast as well as Cairns and there will be some counselling done.

**Ms RYAN:** Definitely. The practitioners at the Sexual Abuse Counselling Service work with practitioners throughout the state in terms of advising them and consulting with them on an ongoing basis about how they are working with those young children and their families. It is not just one-off advice. They will follow through with the practitioners in terms of giving them both advice and also oversighting and monitoring how that service is provided, so it is a very specialised service. Now it actually enables a whole range of community organisations throughout the state as well as their own practitioners to work with children who have experienced sexual abuse. Previously, there was no such expertise available for children under 10. I should say that our last figures indicate that 40 per cent of the children accessing that service were children under 10.

**The CHAIRMAN:** The time allocated to non-government members has expired. I call the member for Glass House.

<sup>031</sup> **Mr COPELAND:** I just have one point. In relation to my first question, Minister, you said that you would get that information back to me by the end of the session. You have that, have you?

**Ms SPENCE:** Actually, I do not know how this fits in, but I have an answer to one of the questions that we took from the member for Cunningham that we indicated we could reply to by the end of this session. Is that possible now?

**The CHAIRMAN:** I think I can allocate that time.

**Ms SPENCE:** Mr Copeland asked how many Family Services officers did the department employ in the past four years. It should be noted that Family Services officers are just one group of direct service delivery staff. Other categories are family and community workers, family resource workers, team leaders and so on. The number of Family Services officers employed over the past four years are as follows. In June 1998 there were 275.9—this is full-time equivalents. In June 1999 there were 306.1, which is an increase of 30. In June 2000 there were 358.6, which is an increase of 52.5. In June 2001 there were 403.8, an increase of 45.2.

**Ms MALE:** In relation to page 1-14 of the MPS, could you tell us whether the diversionary strategies which have been adopted for some young people who have come into contact with the law have been successful?

**Ms SPENCE:** I can give you that information. On 31 March this year the Department of Families was supervising 1,423 young people on probation orders, the supervised sentence order most widely used by courts. Young people on probation report regularly to caseworkers, who assist them to identify the reasons for their offending and help them change their behaviour. This may involve participation in programs to address issues such as anger management, drug and alcohol abuse, and victims awareness.

In 1999—the last year for which our national data is available—Queensland had lower rates of juvenile detention than the Northern Territory, Western Australia and New South Wales and experienced lower rates than the national average in the last two quarterly periods of 1999. Since that time, detention numbers in Queensland have declined even further. The average number of young people on detention was 146 in March of 1999 and 93 in March of 2001, a reduction of 36 per cent. As I said before, I think that we are seeing some very positive statistics come out in terms of young people's contact with the formal criminal justice system. It certainly tells us that our diversionary strategies are working.

**Ms STONE:** I refer to pages 1-20 through to 1-23 of the MPS. Could the minister please explain if there are any strategies put in place by the Department of Families to try to remedy the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the juvenile justice system?

**Ms SPENCE:** We are certainly concerned about the overrepresentation of indigenous children in the system. Indigenous children comprise about five per cent of the Queensland population in the 10 to 16 year age group, but at any time they comprise over 50 per cent of the young people in our detention centre. This even compares unfavourably with the number of indigenous adults in our detention centres. So we know we have a serious issue there.

I believe that the justice agreement that we signed last year with the indigenous community will certainly focus our collective attention on reducing the number of indigenous juveniles in our detention centres. Obviously the factors contributing to these poor statistics are complex and often multifaceted and have their roots in a

number of issues outside this department's area of responsibility. We will continue to address strategies relating to their overrepresentation in the years ahead.

<sup>032</sup> A primary focus of the department's youth pilot justice services, located at Ipswich, Logan City and Townsville, is the reduction of indigenous overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system, particularly in detention. Each service has significant numbers of indigenous staff, who work closely with local agencies to divert indigenous children away from crime.

The Department of Families distributes approximately \$2.8 million each year to assist a wide range of projects and services to prevent youth crime. Over 40 per cent of this funding last year was specifically directed at reducing the factors contributing to offending by indigenous young people, and many other projects also cater for indigenous youth.

We know particularly that if we are going to reach our target of reducing the number of indigenous young people in our criminal justice system, particularly in detention centres, we have to work closely with the indigenous community. I believe that the Department of Families is on target to do that. As minister for both families and indigenous policy in this state, I believe we can improve the relationship between these two departments.

All members might do well to remember that the indigenous community in this state has had a real distrust of the Department of Families over the whole of this state's history. The Department of Families was indeed the department that took away their children and put them in institutions. I think the department has gone a long way in the past few years to breaking down the barriers, but there is still some distrust out there. One way we can overcome that distrust, I think, is by ensuring that we go out there and talk to indigenous Queenslanders, put them on our consultation boards and make them part of the process and give them responsibility for these statistics and this problem.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Thank you, Minister. The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates in the area of Families has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. The minister must be just about hoarse after four and a half hours of questions.

**Ms SPENCE:** I understand that the Premier only got three hours—and I was here longer than the Treasurer, whose budget it is.

**The CHAIRMAN:** Before they leave, I remind officers that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard QuickAccess website within two hours. I thank the committee for their cooperation here today. Before I conclude, on behalf of the committee I thank the Hansard staff, the timekeepers and the attendants. I particularly appreciate the hard work and assistance of my research director, Meg Hoban. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 30 May 2001.

The committee adjourned at 5.47 p.m.