

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B**

Mr G. J. Wilson (Chair)

Mr J. M. English  
Mr W. B. I. Flynn  
Mr G. E. MaloneMrs C. M. Scott  
Mrs C. A. Smith  
Mr L. J. Springborg**ATTORNEY-GENERAL, JUSTICE****IN ATTENDANCE**Hon. R. J. Welford, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice  
Dr K. Levy, Director-General  
Mr R. Newton, Director, Financial Services  
Mr G. Hannigan, Executive Director, Legal and Corporate Services

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The committee commenced at 9.00 a.m.

**The CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee B now open. I welcome the Attorney-General, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2002 for the areas as set out in the sessional orders. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice from 9 a.m. to 12 noon; the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.; and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services from 4.15 p.m. to 7.15 p.m.

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

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 the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 195 relating to strangers, the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In relation to media coverage of the Estimates Committee B hearing, the committee has resolved that television file footage without sound will be allowed for the opening statements by the chair and ministers and that radio and print media coverage will be allowed at other times.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Attorney-General, if you wish you may make an opening statement, but would you please limit it to no more than five minutes.

**Mr WELFORD:** Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee, for the opportunity to appear at the 2002 estimates. I am here today to comment on and present the government's budget for the 2002-03 year for the portfolio of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The budget this year is the most significant for some time for the portfolio because it underwrites a number of major commitments that will make our justice system more effective. Importantly, our government is strengthening its commitment to combat crime with a budget funding injection of \$7.6 million over the next four years for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, including a new Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit. We intend to revitalise the Office of the DPP to improve its capacity to prosecute criminals and target the drug lords. I am determined to have the

Queensland DPP set a very high standard and have the complete confidence of the legal profession, the judiciary and the Queensland people.

This budget also supports a comprehensive change in the coronial system. Funding of \$13.7 million over four years has been provided to undertake a comprehensive overhaul of our coronial system and create an Office of the State Coroner. Our government recognises that an effective coronial system can play a significant part in building safer communities through the prevention of further deaths and injuries. This funding commitment in the state budget provides the go-ahead for substantial changes. Many of those changes will be embodied in the new Coroners Act which I will be introducing into parliament later this year.

I am also pleased to advise the committee that the budget gives further impetus to the drug court program. Some \$13.5 million has been allocated over the next three years for the north Queensland trial and a further \$7.5 million for the existing trial in south-east Queensland. Our government has also committed \$39 million this financial year to modernise the courts, with \$16.1 million allocated to the Brisbane Magistrates Court project. We will be building a new court at Richlands and upgrading facilities in Mackay, Cooktown, Townsville and Southport.

The budget also supports our commitment to indigenous justice. We will be spending just under \$1 million over the next four years to train more indigenous JPs and expand the network of Magistrates Courts constituted by these JPs. This is one of the key strategies of our government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement. I thank you, Mr Chairman, for the opportunity to make these opening comments and welcome questions from your committee.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney-General. The first period of questions is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Good morning, Attorney. I refer you to page 4-5 of the MPS relating to the Office of the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner, and I commend the commissioner for the good job that she and her officers continue to do on behalf of Queenslanders. I notice that there has been some concern expressed that the number of complaints closed has actually been less than what was suggested last year as a consequence of staffing positions which were vacant. I would like an indication from the Attorney that sufficient resources will be committed to this office over the next year to ensure that appropriate staff numbers will be in place to enable the Anti-Discrimination Commission to do its job. I further refer you to the commissioner's statement in her annual report where she expressed some concern about the lack of appropriate resources which were necessary to properly enforce your new anti-racial vilification laws. What resources have you made available to assist her in doing that job this year?

**Mr WELFORD:** I thank the shadow minister for his question. It is true that the number of complaints finalised in the past financial year is less than the estimate originally indicated. The estimate for the forthcoming year is roughly equivalent to last year's estimate. The number of matters finally closed will obviously depend on how many complaints are made, so it is possible that in the coming year the estimate of complaints closed will be similar to this year or even higher, depending on how many complaints are received and how quickly they are resolved. Some complaints are obviously more easily resolved than others. Some are more complex; some are less complex.

In relation to the comment in the annual report, that comment was made in the context of the new racial and religious vilification laws that our government passed—the very first legislation we passed in this session of parliament—to address the government's election commitment in that regard. The commissioner had asked for additional funds to undertake community awareness and public education in relation to those new laws. The fact is that there is already a high demand for community education and liaison services within the commission and it already allocates some resources to that, of course. But I am satisfied that the work that the commission is doing is being undertaken most competently. The publicity surrounding the implementation of the laws at the time I think was adequate to address the need for public awareness in relation to the introduction of those new laws. I am certainly happy to ensure that sufficient resources are available for that purpose in the coming year.

The commission estimates that it will have more matters to deal with in the coming year than it did in the year just past. Two conciliated positions funded in last year's budget have allowed the commission to maintain the timeliness of file closures during the last financial year. Some 73 per cent of files have closed within six months of opening and 92 per cent of files have closed within 12 months of opening.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I draw the Attorney's attention now to the drug court program and commend the program. However, I do have some concerns about its effectiveness to date. I also refer the Attorney to his answer to question on notice No. 7 where he indicated that since the program had actually commenced there have been 29 graduations from that program and that it usually takes between 12 and 18 months for a person to successfully complete the program once they have been assessed and put on the program. I ask the Attorney-General the amount of expenditure to date on that program in the south-east Queensland drug court trial and what percentage of people who have entered the program have successfully graduated.

**Mr WELFORD:** As the honourable member noted in the answer to that question on notice No. 7, the drug court has referred 472 people for possible inclusion in the program. Some 220 intensive drug rehabilitation orders have been made. Some 83 out of that 220 are still active participants and of those we now have 31 graduations, so a further two since the answer was given. Graduations are now—at this latter part of the trial pilot—occurring at the rate of about one a week. So we will start to see an acceleration in the number of graduates as we move into that latter part of the 12 to 18 months of the rehabilitation period that the current participants are in.

Of those 83 participants, 24 are inpatient programs and 59 are outpatient programs. There are about 25 who are still subject to active orders but not actively participating. In other words, they are currently absent from their program and are likely to be breached when they next appear in court. But of the 108-odd orders that are still active, 61 of the participants are in phase 1, 26 are in phase 2 and 21 are in phase 3 of the program. So we will see in a relatively short period of time 21 people in their third phase reach graduation, in addition to the 31 who have already reached graduation. So in the next few months we expect to see over 50 graduates out of the 108 who are active.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** There is one other element of my question that the Attorney did not address and that is the amount of expenditure to date on the program.

**Mr WELFORD:** Sorry; I apologise. To 30 June 2002, \$6.15 million roughly has been spent on the program.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** \$6.15 million.

**Mr WELFORD:** There is no question that the program is intensive. It is an expensive way of addressing these issues. As I have indicated in the past, one of the criteria for measuring the ultimate success of these kinds of programs is a comparison with the cost of imprisonment. At this stage we are still doing better than that cost. However, we also need to take into account the fact that there are ancillary benefits such as the reduction in recidivism and the social benefits of people actually graduating from the cycle of drug addiction that would otherwise not occur, or would be very unlikely to occur, if people were imprisoned.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** What are those comparative costs? Obviously the people who have not successfully completed the program and who have fallen out of the system are probably being dealt with by the criminal justice system in another way, that is, incarcerated. I would like for you to be able to compare that to the cost of the program because it seems to me that, whilst we have had our first real batch of people through the program, if you divide 30 into \$6.515 million there is a significant cost per graduate of some hundreds of thousands of dollars for successful completion.

**Mr WELFORD:** Well, if you do that simple arithmetic, it is true that it looks extremely expensive but you have to remember that that amount of expenditure has contributed to the substantial fulfilment of the rehabilitation of a number of people still active in the program, so the full value of that investment has yet to be fully reflected in graduations. In terms of a full evaluation, all of us will have to await the completion of the pilot. It is too early to make a final assessment about the cost effectiveness of this initiative. We have, as you know, engaged the Australian Institute of Criminology to undertake an evaluation of the program. A preliminary analysis of that has been drafted by the Institute of Criminology and we will get a final report once the pilot program is finished.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** At this stage it is fair to say that—keeping in mind we are dealing with expenditure to date and graduates to date but there will be a relativity because people are entering the program or continuing the program as more money is being made available—we are basically dealing with about \$200,000 per successful graduate. I did ask a moment ago through you, Mr Chairman, about the relative cost benefit when compared to the criminal justice system that these people would go through normally where you might be dealing with, say, \$30,000 or

potentially \$40,000 per year depending on the category and the security of the facility that they would be otherwise kept in.

**Mr WELFORD:** As I understand it, the cost of imprisonment is about \$75,000 a year per prisoner.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That is maximum security.

**Mr WELFORD:** It is the cost of any prisoner. Maximum security requires more labour cost in terms of supervision but the costs of keeping people in prison as distinct from non-custodial circumstances on average are at about \$75,000 a year. In any event, as I have just indicated, your question cannot be fully determined until we have completed the pilot and the final evaluation is done. Yes, it appears to me, as it appears to you, that initial indications are that this program is expensive, but I have never said that this was a way of dealing with the crime problem or the drug problem on the cheap. This was always going to be a way of dealing more intensively and earlier with people who come before the courts on charges of serious drug use and addiction and who face imprisonment. They are not people who are small-time users; they are not people who have necessarily appeared before the court on their first occasion. They are often people who are subject to multiple charges and may also be associated with a string of property crimes. The social cost of the crime that they are committing compared to what can be avoided if we succeed in graduating them through a rehabilitation program is enormous. That is the reason the substantial investment is being made. We cannot determine yet whether that social cost, together with savings from imprisonment, exceed the overall community benefit of the cost that would otherwise be incurred if they were processed in the normal course through the criminal justice system. As soon as the trial is finished and the evaluation report is undertaken by the Institute of Criminology we will make it public.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I would like to proceed with that issue more but obviously time constraints mean that we should move on. I draw the attention of the Attorney to page 1-26 of the portfolio statement, particularly the column 'Penalty Enforcement'. I note the number of new fines registered by the State Penalties Enforcement Registry and the estimated target for 2001-02 was 250,000. The estimated actual doubled to 500,000. I draw the Attorney's attention to footnote 3 where I note that the number of matters registered in 2001-02 was higher than expected due to the lodgment of a large quantity of defaulted fines from the courts and an increase in lodgments from the Queensland Transport and Traffic Camera Office. It seems to me that there have been an unexpected large number of traffic camera lodgments and you are expecting that next year's figures will be less. Why should we believe that they will be less?

**Mr WELFORD:** A large portion of what was loaded into the system this year included matters that were already within the old system called SETONS, which you would recall. A large number of matters that were already in the system had to be loaded across. Certainly, the additional items that came in were substantially greater than anticipated, but that will provide us with a guide as to the year on year annual flow that will occur. There is no reason to believe, for example, that next year will necessarily result in more transport or traffic fines coming across than this year, unless there is a substantial increase in police effort in that regard. Most of them in terms of red-light cameras and speed cameras are determined by the location of those cameras and the number of cameras that exist, and I am not aware of any likely substantial increase in returns from that.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It would seem to be best guess and somewhat wishful thinking to expect that if we have had a 100 per cent increase in the actual matters handed over to the State Penalties Enforcement Registry that it would actually increase 50,000 on the actual. This seems to be basically relying on a best guess system here. I would like to know the methodology that you use. It seems to me that it is best guess. What do you use—tarot cards? How do you work this out? How did you work it out last year? How many additional traffic camera type matters were actually referred to SPER than what you thought would be?

**Mr WELFORD:** If you want a breakdown of the various types of matters that were referred and how many more of them were referred than was anticipated in last year's estimates, I can take that on notice and give you those details. The overall figures are there and are transparent. I am not seeking to deny that there was a substantially greater demand for the services of the SPER registry than was anticipated by the department last year. One effect of that will be that we will be making a much stronger effort to recover that money. SPER has been, it must be remembered, the most successful initiative yet to recover outstanding fines without resulting in something like 25 per cent of our prisons being occupied by fine defaulters. The proof of SPER has been in its effectiveness to date.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My issue is not so much the effectiveness of SPER. My issue is basically how you come to a conclusion. It is not the outstanding matters that need to be followed up and getting fine defaulters out of jail, it is in regards to new matters and how you are going about calculating effectively the increased number of fines that will be dealt with by SPER. As you are very much aware, there is a great concern in the community that we are having a fine-led recovery with regard to the number of these traffic taming devices that are used on our roads. Is there any sort of overall comprehensive process from government to look at the effectiveness of its traffic management program? Surely if the benchmark it is setting itself is being so excessively exceeded there is something wrong with the current process of using those traffic management devices, that is, speed cameras or red-light cameras. That is why I think we need a far better understanding of the methodology that your department and the police are actually using in being able to work out the effectiveness in the next year.

**Mr WELFORD:** if you want more detail on the basis on which red-light cameras and speed cameras are used then you need to ask those questions of the relevant minister. Suffice it to say that the Department of Justice has no better way of assessing future demand for SPER's services than to gain indications from the various departments that it serves of what their approximate anticipated demand for SPER's services will be. That is the basis on which the figures have been presented. SPER does not generate the demand; SPER simply responds to the demand, as you say. There is no whole-of-government strategy to increase or reduce the number of penalties being imposed. After all, those penalties are imposed only to the extent that breaches occur. The ultimate determinant of the number of penalties referred to SPER are the Queensland public themselves. SPER is doing a valiant job, notwithstanding the fact that I have been discussing with staff for some months now the fact that they have been wrestling with workloads much greater than they anticipated. We have been in discussions with Treasury and CBRC to monitor that and we will keep it under review in case additional resources are needed in the coming year, depending on how demand pans out.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** The first session allocated to non-government members has expired. I now call on the member for Charters Towers.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-2 of the MPS in which it is stated that the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions is to be strengthened with a commitment of \$5.5 million over the next four years. Can the Attorney explain what changes will occur?

**Mr WELFORD:** I thank the honourable member for Charters Towers. As I have stated on other occasions, I intend to ensure that Queensland has the best Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions of any jurisdiction in the country. It is fair to say that the Office of the DPP has for some years had to deal with an increasing workload. This has placed considerable pressure on all staff in the Office of the DPP, including senior prosecutors as well as more junior legal officers. Those officers perform, in my view, an outstanding job on behalf of all Queenslanders by dealing with the most serious crime confronting the community in our state. They are at the front line of our prosecution service and deal with the most complex criminal cases that our courts hear.

The issues confronting the Office of the DPP largely result from the fact that there has never been a long-term strategy to deal with its operations. I am sure we all agree that the Office of the DPP is central to the effective functioning of our criminal justice system. It underpins public confidence in our criminal justice system. Of course, it contributes directly to our government's key priority of safer and more supportive communities. So I intend to address the challenges facing the DPP in conjunction with the director herself not by some sort of quick fix for political benefit but by implementing a long-term strategy to revitalise that office. The first step, of course, is to ensure that the budget is strong. That is why \$5.5 million over the next four years has been allocated to introduce these strategies, so that we can have a first-rate prosecution service in our Queensland courts.

I want to ensure there are modern legal practice management systems put in place to improve case preparation and quality control. The number of prosecutors will be increased to 50 to create the strongest prosecution team we will have had ever in our state's history. There will also be some increases to support staff.

There will be a review of current systems and processes undertaken independently to ensure that we examine how we can improve systems in the office, improve the attraction of high-quality staff and encourage a career path that develops the more junior prosecutors and retains the more senior ones. People of the highest calibre are needed to prosecute criminal cases before our courts, and the strategies that I will introduce will, I believe, result in better case preparation, greater supervision and quality control and more experienced staff to conduct prosecutions and

reduce delays in prosecutions. All these measures will provide strong support for the director and her team to vigorously pursue those who flout our state laws.

**Mrs SMITH:** The member for Southern Downs earlier referred to the drug court graduations. Based on the success of this program, I refer the Attorney to page 1-3 of the MPS and the plan to further expand the drug court trial to Cairns and Townsville. Could the Attorney explain the benefits of the drug court and the timing of this expansion?

**Mr WELFORD:** As the honourable member for Burleigh is aware, this is an important initiative on the part of our government. It is part of our commitment to tackle not just crime itself but the causes of crime. The expansion in north Queensland addresses this issue in north Queensland communities. The drug courts to be established in Cairns and Townsville will fulfil the commitment we made to the people of north Queensland before the last election. As the Premier announced at our recent community cabinet meeting in Cairns, the starting date proposed is 1 November this year. A total of \$13.5 million over three years has been allocated across all agencies involved in the expansion. My department is the lead agency, working closely with the Departments of Health, Housing, Families and Corrective Services, as well as the Queensland Police Service and Legal Aid Queensland.

As the committee may be aware, the drug court began in June 2000 with our south-east Queensland trial. This north Queensland trial will build upon that platform laid in the drug courts operating in Beenleigh, Southport and Ipswich. Unlike the drug courts overseas, we are dealing with serious offenders—people addicted to hard-core drugs such as heroin, cocaine and amphetamines. So far we have had 31 graduates in south-east Queensland, and I do not think we should underestimate the contribution the drug court can make to our communities. Research tells us that three out of every four crimes is drug related. Every successful rehabilitation means that there are fewer house break-ins, car thefts and other crimes committed by drug addicts who are trying to support their habit. The drug court is not a soft option. If offenders on the program do not stick to the rules then they go to jail. The north Queensland expansion will build on the knowledge we have gained in the trial down here in south-east Queensland so far.

Prior to the start of the Cairns and Townsville drug courts, staff will be recruited and trained and the necessary infrastructure, including rehabilitation service providers, will be put in place to operate the program. We are running the north Queensland program according to a slightly different model so that we can compare or benchmark the effectiveness of the two approaches between north Queensland and south Queensland and, ultimately, improve both systems to achieve better results in the longer term. Only those drug addicted offenders who have never been in prison previously or were in prison for a term of one month or less will be eligible for the program in north Queensland. We are limiting the number of offenders placed on rehabilitation orders to 40 in each city at any one time. This will be in line with the services currently available in north Queensland.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-2 of the MPS which states that the coronial system needs to be overhauled. Could the Attorney detail for the committee the changes that will occur and their expected impact?

**Mr WELFORD:** The honourable member for Redlands has raised an important issue that has been around for a long, long time. A lot has been spoken and written about the coronial system. I am pleased to say that this year the Beattie government will deliver on reforming the coronial system once and for all. We are the only jurisdiction in Australia not to have a state coroner. Currently, all of our 75 magistrates have been able to sit as coroners, but there has been no single person or dedicated office to coordinate the system, although the chief magistrate does have a general overseeing role. The focus has been in the past simply to establish the cause of death and determine whether a person should stand trial for an offence arising from the death. There has not until now been a focus on systemic issues, such as the causes of accidents or injuries resulting in death.

The allocation of \$13.7 million over four years, including \$7.7 million to the coroner's office and the Justice Department and \$6 million for Queensland Health to assist in pathology assessments in this year's state budget, will underwrite a comprehensive change. I intend to build a modern and efficient coronial system. Many of the changes will be embodied in the new Coroners Act, which I intend to introduce later this year. We will be appointing a state coroner to oversee and coordinate the system for the first time. There will be an emphasis on coordinating data and identifying patterns emerging from deaths that occur in a similar way. Coroners will be given the power to make recommendations on ways to prevent future deaths of a similar kind. The categories of reportable deaths will be modernised to include deaths in care as well as

mandatory reporting of deaths in custody. The state coroner will ensure that there is a uniform approach on these issues, including issues such as whether a full or partial post mortem is necessary and whether an inquest is necessary.

There will be additional staff recruited for the Office of the State Coroner to help coordinate the system, and we will ensure that there is ongoing participation in the National Coronial Information System. The national database will give us access in Queensland to interstate experiences and trends as well. This will provide us with a valuable insight into how we can prevent future similar deaths.

The funds allocated to Queensland Health will be used to provide resources for the John Tonge Centre. That is mainly to support an anticipated increase in the number of post mortems carried out because of changes we are making in the system. By developing a coronial system that is efficient, responsive and compassionate we will not only respond better to the needs of families but also produce outcomes that help build safer communities.

**The CHAIR:** Attorney, you have addressed the question of the SPER penalty enforcement system in previous answers, but I wonder whether, with specific reference to page 1-25 of the MPS, you might elaborate on the expression there used of full implementation of the SPER model and outline the effectiveness of SPER since its introduction.

**Mr WELFORD:** SPER, or the State Penalties Enforcement Registry, has been the most successful approach to collecting unpaid fines in our state's history, as I mentioned earlier. Since it was introduced in November 2000, SPER has recovered more than \$52 million in outstanding fines. The major difference between SPER and previous systems is that SPER places an emphasis on collection of the fine rather than sending the fine defaulter to jail.

Let us look at some simple facts. When our government came to office in 1998, 25 per cent of all prison admissions were fine defaulters, and many of them were Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. In December 1999 there were 397 fine defaulters in our jails, and the number was escalating. Locking up people for fine defaulting was not working; it did not recover the money owed to the state, it was crowding our jails with minor offenders and it was costing taxpayers thousands of dollars a week in prison costs. Our government introduced SPER to place more emphasis on the proactive collection of money and less on custodial action.

To achieve its objective SPER has employed a range of new initiatives, including using a call centre and mail-outs, to take a proactive approach to chasing defaulters and negotiating payments; the introduction of instalment payments; and providing a range of payment options not available in Magistrates Courts, such as credit card, EFTPOS, direct debit, Australia Post and, more recently, a centre pay facility for those clients receiving Centrelink payments. We are streamlining the collection process for fine issuing authorities such as Queensland Transport, and, of course, we have made jail a last resort.

SPER has been able to do all this because it employs state-of-the-art computer technology that allows many of these processes to occur automatically electronically. Currently, SPER is using licence suspension to encourage people to pay fines. This will be further enhanced by the gradual expansion of the centre pay facility and full implementation of the remaining enforcement options under the SPER model. These enforcement options include a civil enforcement pilot, compulsory garnishee options against fine defaulters' bank accounts and employers' wage payments, and an automatic enforcement module allowing for system management of defaulting fines. We now have a proper balance between proactively chasing money owed and taking tough action against those people who think they are above the law or who think the rest of Queensland should subsidise their failure to pay fines.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-18 of the MPS and the reference to the number of victims of crime supported. I note that the figure for 2001-02 was over 6,200. Could the Attorney explain what this support entails and what services are in place to assist victims?

**Mr WELFORD:** The issue of victims of crime is now well and truly on the radar screen of government in Queensland. Fifteen years ago victims of crime were virtually unseen or unrecognised in the criminal justice system. It is fair to say now that our government is committed to advancing the rights of victims and improving protection and support for them. We provide services through many different agencies, including Queensland Health, the Families Department and, of course, my own Department of Justice and Attorney-General.

Since 1998 we have given priority to improving protection for victims of crime by introducing a range of reforms. We have established a victims liaison office in the Office of the DPP, with 15

victim liaison officers statewide whose primary responsibility is to inform victims about the progress of their case in the justice system. We are progressively equipping courts with closed circuit television, or CCTV, to reduce the trauma for victims when giving evidence. We are giving magistrates the power to make pre-trial directions and rulings about how witnesses may give evidence before a hearing begins. This will help alleviate a victim's anxiety about their day in court and how they have to give evidence. We have amended the Jury Act to enable jurors lists to contain a name and locality rather than a full name. We are giving the judiciary powers to issue non-contact orders of up to two years as part of a sentence for any indictable offence, and we are introducing tough penalties for reprisals or threats against jurors and witnesses. Of course, many witnesses themselves are victims of crime.

Later this year I intend to take a further package of reforms to cabinet responding to the Queensland Law Reform Commission report on the evidence of children. This report placed a strong emphasis on the proper protection of children who appear in court as witnesses. I strongly believe that our laws must reflect the difficult circumstances in which children could be placed when required to give evidence before the courts. In terms of the liaison officers in the Office of the DPP, these are located in each of the DPP's regional offices, with the remainder in the Brisbane office. The victim liaison officers help victims by providing them with information about the progress of their case through the system, advising them of their right to submit a victim impact statement at the time of the offender's sentencing and acting as a point of contact within the DPP. They also refer victims to appropriate specialist services for court support, counselling or medical and legal assistance.

**Mrs SMITH:** You made a reference in your last answer to closed circuit television facilities. On page 1-22 of the MPS there is a reference to the installation of closed circuit television facilities. Could you outline where these facilities are available, what benefits they provide and whether there are plans to extend them further?

**Mr WELFORD:** Our government is committed to ensuring that victims of crime who appear in court as witnesses are given a fair go and are not subject to intimidation in the very court system that is supposed to respond to the crime to which they have fallen victim. Not only have we introduced non-contact orders but, as the honourable member indicates, we are extending the provision of facilities for vulnerable witnesses to more Queensland courts.

It is our policy to include closed circuit television facilities in all new or refurbished courts. These facilities enable child witnesses especially or victims of sexual assault to give evidence from a separate room in the court precinct. This is an important step in reducing the trauma and intimidation these people face when giving evidence at court hearings. Victims of crime should not suffer additional trauma from the way they are treated by the criminal justice system. This is particularly important for children who may have been the victim of violence or sexual offences and who have to give evidence against the accused.

In some centres closed circuit TV is part of a comprehensive and integrated video court system which uses video conferencing technology to hear evidence and communicate with people from other video conferencing sites anywhere in the state or indeed the world. The full video court systems which incorporate closed circuit TV presently operate in the Supreme Court, Court of Appeal and District Court in Brisbane, the Brisbane Arrest Court in Roma Street and in the regional Magistrates Court at Caboolture and Mount Isa. Stand alone closed circuit TV systems are in place in the Supreme Courts at Townsville and Cairns, in the District Courts at Rockhampton, Gladstone, Southport, Maryborough, Maroochydore, Beenleigh and Ipswich and also in the Magistrates Courts at Toowoomba, Wynnum and Cleveland. In a number of these locations access to closed circuit TV facilities is shared between Magistrates Court and the Supreme or District Courts.

Looking to the immediate future, our government will install closed circuit TV systems in the refurbished Mackay courthouse, in the new Richlands courthouse and in a number of courts in the new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex due for completion by mid-2004. The Director of Public Prosecutions has also advised me that prosecutors will seek court orders for the use of these closed circuit TV facilities in all trials involving child witnesses under 12 years of age. I strongly support this approach. It is essential we do everything we can to protect vulnerable witnesses in the justice system.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for government questions has expired.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I take you back to the number of matters enforced by the State Penalties Enforcement Registry last year, which increased a quarter of a million from 250,000 to 500,000,



and the fact that you believe it will be 50,000 less in the current year. That is on page 1-26. I refer you to the Statement of Financial Performance and Revenues on page 1-45. Under taxes, fees and fines your budget for the current financial year was \$78 million. The estimated actual was \$79 million and you are there proposing that in the forthcoming year you will be collecting almost \$11 million in additional taxes, fees and fines, notwithstanding the fact that you are suggesting that the number of SPER matters will fall. How do you reconcile that? Of that \$11 million, how much will be administered on behalf of other government agencies, namely Police, and how much will be new fines that you are projecting will be administered through SPER?

**Mr WELFORD:** As I have indicated to the honourable member previously, if he would like a specific breakdown of taxes, fees and fines then we are happy to try to give him that detail on notice. He should remember that the increase we are talking about does not relate only to fines. As he says, the figures SPER has provided do not indicate that there is necessarily going to be a substantial increase in fines from that source, depending on the rate of recovery of course.

It needs to be remembered that the number of fines referred to SPER was substantially greater than it expected. Last year's estimate of its recovery was based on resources allocated according to what it anticipated the number of fines would be. Given that it had more fines to recover than it anticipated, there is some likelihood that it will get more money. In any event, there is additional revenue by way of taxes that will come from increased court filing fees. They will contribute substantially to an increase in the overall revenue of the department.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I draw your attention to footnote 1 on page 1-49. It is indicated there that it expects the increase in revenue to be primarily due to the enforcement of fines. My question was to do with new fines. I do not see an indication there that it is expecting there will be a significant increase because of the new fee structure which is to be implemented in the courts. You must have some idea of how much you are expecting. You must have some form of methodology other than best guess, crystal ball or whatever you have been using to date to determine why that will increase, primarily as a consequence of additional fine matters before SPER and why it is going to collect up to \$11 million.

**Mr WELFORD:** The footnote the honourable member refers to relates to item 1. You are right. I apologise. It does relate to taxes, fees and fines. My understanding is that we are talking about certainly an increase in fines and forfeitures estimated at about \$2 million. We anticipate the value of the fines and forfeitures that make up that category to be about \$2 million plus. Taxes, fines and fees incorporate not only fines and forfeitures but also fees from the registrar general in relation to births, deaths and marriages, Supreme Court fees, Magistrates Court fees, appeal cost fund fees and District Court fees. So there are a number of categories, all of which will have incremental increases in the revenue anticipated to be drawn from them that account for that.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I refer to page 3-14, which relates to the Public Trustee. Keeping in mind that the government's commitment has been not to increase fees beyond increases in CPI, I draw your attention to the statement of financial position under current assets, receivables. It was indicated in the 2001-02 budget year that just over \$3 million would be received by the Public Trustee. In actual fact it exceeded that by more than 100 per cent—\$6.7 million. That is only since the implementation of a new system on 1 December last year. It seems to me that that has been a 100 per cent increase over and above what you budgeted—100 per cent more than what has been collected before. Surely this is a basic affront to those people who can least afford it who utilise the services of the Public Trustee, bearing in mind that the Public Trustee will spend \$1.2 million on new facilities upgrades. They would want to have double glazed windows to keep the noise of the protests out, I would have thought.

**Mr WELFORD:** Can I check the page with you?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It is page 3-14. Also there is footnote 1 on page 3-19, relating to major variations to the increase in user charges.

**Mr WELFORD:** I take the opportunity to commend the Public Trustee on the excellent work the Public Trustee does. That is reflected in the fact that the business of the Public Trustee is growing, and growing strongly. It does not reflect the fact that there has been any massive increase in the level of fees or the rate of fees that the Public Trustee charges. The Public Trustee's fees, as you know, are fixed from time to time, with approval of the Attorney-General. The fees have not been increased while I have been the Attorney-General.

What has changed is that the Public Trust Office is undergoing significant management improvement such that its performance is now growing the business, and the volume of assets

the Public Trustee has under management is likewise growing. This will see further growth in future years, so do not be surprised if when we come back next year you are prompted to ask a similar kind of question, because the Public Trustee is in the process of looking at new areas of business—providing support, for example, to community organisations that wish to use a safe venue for investment of collective community organisation funds. These new opportunities for the Public Trustee, to play a valuable role in supporting not just vulnerable people but also voluntary community groups throughout the state, are ones I am encouraging the Public Trustee to get involved in. That will, I expect, see an increase in its revenue over this and coming years.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The Attorney-General's years of incisive legal training obviously lead him to read things I do not read. The footnote on page 3-19 states—

The increase in user charges in the 2001-02 estimated actual is due to the Public Trustee's new scale of fees and charges which came into effect from 1 December 2001. When the 2001-02 budget was developed, it was based on the commission-based scale of charges that existed at that time. On 1 December 2001, the Public Trustee implemented a new scale of fees and charges in relation to its deceased estate and trust activities.

It does not matter how much you dress this up; you suggested that there would be \$3 million. Almost \$7 million was collected—about 120 per cent in addition—and it was impacting upon those people who could least afford it, those people who were to be covered principally by the aims of the public curator in 1915 when the Ryan government implemented it. You have gone away from 90 years of a basic fundamental principle which we all agree with.

**Mr WELFORD:** Very good, Mr Springborg. My years of incisive legal training also taught me one thing the honourable member did not do in his recitation of item 1 in those explanatory notes; that is, to read the whole clause, not half of the clause. The whole clause, beyond the point the honourable member mentioned, states—

Under this new scale, revenue is recognised on a gross basis whereas in prior years fees and charges were only levied where the client was able to pay. Where a client, because of financial circumstances, cannot pay the full amount of the new fee, that client is given a rebate for all or part of the fees that have been levied. This rebate of fees is treated as an expense ... Accounting for revenue from fees on a gross basis and then allowing a fee rebate as an expense is in accordance with the section 5(1) of Australian Accounting Standard 1—Statement of Financial Performance.

So the reason for the increase is that as we move to accrual accounting, when a fee is levied, instead of dealing with it only on a cash basis and reporting it once it is recovered, the accounts will show a higher amount because it is levied at the full amount. But if the full amount is unable to be later paid, then a rebate is registered to reflect that fact. That is why, if you read the full footnote, you will understand the explanation for the larger amount appearing in the accounts.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So \$6.7 million is not really \$6.7 million; it is in reality somewhat less?

**Mr WELFORD:** It may well end up being less, yes.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It may well, but it may end up being that or it may end up being somewhat more. You also indicated, 'Don't be surprised if I come back at some future time and raise a similar issue in this particular committee.' Does that mean, by admission, that given you have projected \$6.69 million next year in revenue, which is less than what you believe you are actually going to recoup this year—or maybe you will or you will not, or whatever the case may be—we are supposed to believe that, given the fact that you have said that we may be asking questions about it being more next year, that you have understated what you can realistically expect to collect over the next year?

**Mr WELFORD:** What is stated in the accounts reflects the best estimate of forthcoming revenue that the Public Trustee can make based on their current client base, the current members of the community who they assiduously serve. What I indicated to you is that I believe that the work of the Public Trustee is now improving in such a way that that client base and the assets base that they will manage will increase in subsequent years and it would not surprise me if, in future years, we exceed our estimates.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I would like to keep on with that. I would like to move to 1-40, which is to do with matters of public works that the minister's department administers. I note that under 'property, plant and equipment' it was suggested that \$18,500,000 would be spent, for example, on the new Brisbane courthouse, and \$13.1 million was in actual fact spent. Total property plant and equipment is \$35 million and in actual fact the expenditure was \$26.4 million. So that is about one-third less. Can you please indicate the number of jobs that were projected to have been created by that particular capital works program in the current financial year and how many jobs were actually created during the course of the year and fulfilled?

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not have at my fingertips a figure of the number of jobs that were created by that expenditure in the past financial year. Clearly, there is likely to be less work done in the last financial year than was estimated and that would lead to the presumption that there were fewer jobs created. Of course, we have in the department a substantial public works budget. Most of that has been progressed and, indeed, in some cases such as the upgrade of the Wynnum courthouse we have significantly exceeded the budgeted or the estimated expenditure in capital works in that regard.

The primary difference for the reduction in actuals over estimates for the last financial year reflects the revised timetable for implementing the new Brisbane Magistrates Court building. That followed an extensive review of the alternative tendering models that were being considered for that building. As the honourable member would be aware, the government has recently sought to give further attention to the potential for public-private partnerships. This project was reviewed in that context to see whether it was a project that might be suitable for such a proposal. Indeed, I understand some preliminary submissions were made by various parties for that purpose. In the event, it will not be one of those projects, but that intervening assessment has led to some minor delays in progressing the project. That resulted in deferral of expenditure rather than a failure of that expenditure ever occurring, and you will see that occur next year.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Surely, it is significant that one-third less of the expenditure than was actually budgeted for was actually spent? It was not only Brisbane; it was also Mackay where \$4.8 million was budgeted and \$700,000 was spent. Is this the case basically of the government not being able to implement its diminishing capital works programs and the consequences, of course, being that there are fewer jobs for Queenslanders? Capital works is one of the areas where government, regardless of the department, is able to do something concrete about ensuring additional job employment opportunities and money going into the economy. You do not indicate in any way whatsoever that there was any mismanagement on your part or your department's part in basically not driving this to meet the government's stated objectives.

**Mr WELFORD:** Certainly, our department has a contribution to make in terms of capital works and the jobs that flow from that. The contribution from this particular capital works program is small in comparison to the government's overall roughly \$5 billion program of capital works. But I think that if you look at the record of the government overall, you will see that the government's contribution to job creation has been as strong as any other year. I think that it would be a mistaken approach simply to look at one small component of figures that are indicated here and say that in some way the government has failed to pursue its jobs agenda. On the contrary, the government has overseen not only the largest growth in jobs in terms of public investment in this state for a long time, the largest contribution of any state government to the training of apprentices in a long time, but also a state economy that overall delivers 80 per cent of all new full-time jobs in the entire country. So I do not think that there is anything in these figures that suggests that the government is failing in its job initiatives.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** In predicating my next question, I ask the Attorney-General if I might be able to have copies of the projected number of jobs that were to go with those projects and the actual number that were actually created with regard to those projects. I turn the Attorney-General to 1-26 of the program statements dealing with the output statement, quality Magistrates Court client satisfaction. I note that last year you projected that 80 per cent of people would be really happy with the service that they received from the Magistrates Court. I note at the end of the year that you could not tell us if any were, because you say that it was not available. I note that next year you are not going to be able to tell us either. Surely there must be some sort of way of establishing these benchmarks. How do you go about this? Almost half the people are going to be unhappy, anyway, because you are going to lose. But then you come up with 80 per cent and then you cannot come up with anything. Is that the tarot card reading process again or what?

**Mr WELFORD:** As the note associated with that item indicates, no survey has been performed in the past year to respond to that particular indicator. At this stage, it is unlikely that there will be a survey undertaken in this financial year. The reason for that is that the surveys that relate to this particular item are what are called benchmarking surveys. That is a description to indicate that they are undertaken on a cyclical basis. In other words, they are undertaken every three years. So although we did not have one last year or in this coming year, next year there will be another survey.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for non-government questions—

**Mr WELFORD:** I should just say that in relation to the job estimates that the honourable member asked about in his preface in relation to capital works expenditure indicated on page 1-

40 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, I do not think that the government has ever sought to ascribe a specific job prediction to the overall program of works of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. So it is very unlikely that the figures for that exist.

As the honourable member would know—he has been in government before—what one does for any particular project when a budget is allocated is give an indication of the number of jobs likely to be involved in completing that project based on the budget for the project. If the honourable member wishes, we can take the \$35 million estimated for all capital expenditure in the coming financial year and do a rough estimate on the jobs likely to be involved—some newly created and some already existing—that will be involved in that work, but I am not sure whether that will be especially enlightening.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allocated to non-government questions has expired. I now call on the member for Redlands.

**Mr ENGLISH:** On page 1-16 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements the Attorney-General refers to the legal profession review. Could the Attorney-General explain where the review is up to?

**Mr WELFORD:** Considerable work had already been undertaken on reforms to the legal profession when I became Attorney-General in February last year. There are still some aspects to be finalised. Over the past 12 months we have completed a proposed package of reforms and they are now being assessed as part of our state's obligations under the national competition policy. It is difficult to outline all of the proposed reforms until that assessment is complete, but I think that it is fair to say that the legal profession plays an important role in the economic and social fabric of our community.

The economic activity and investment of our state requires a fair and efficient justice system. Failures in the legal system and the services provided by lawyers obviously undermine the economic confidence and reduce economic activity. So effective legal regulation is critical to the community.

I will be focusing on reforms of the legal profession, which in particular address the management of complaints by legal consumers and the disciplinary processes that apply to lawyers flowing from those complaints. I want to ensure, for example, that there is an independent and efficient process by which complaints against lawyers can be made and determined. This will mean strengthening the role of the legal ombudsman so that the legal ombudsman has overriding, overarching power in respect of any every investigation and every matter that might be referred to the Solicitors Complaints Tribunal or the Legal Practitioners Board, which I anticipate will replace it.

The process for costs agreements and disclosure of costs by lawyers to their clients will be strengthened. The process for assessment of costs and the taxation of costs by an independent party, possibly within the court system, will also be strengthened so that there is no perception either in the management of complaints or in the assessment of costs that in some way Caesar is judging Caesar or that fellow lawyers are sitting in some form of protective arrangement over lawyers whose affairs are being investigated or assessed. Lawyers who overcharge, like doctors who overservice or car repairers who tell you that parts need replacing when they do not, do their trade or profession no credit. Under my new disciplinary system, consumers will have the opportunity of contesting excessive fees.

**The CHAIR:** Order! I refer you to page 1-1 of the MPS and your department's strategic goals of modernising the justice system and protecting the rights of legal consumers. Could you explain what initiatives have been taken to educate young people about our justice system?

**Mr WELFORD:** Like the honourable member for Ferny Grove, I am a strong advocate for helping young people understand their legal rights and the way our justice system works. The advent of new technologies means there are far greater opportunities to reach young people these days—far greater than there were a decade ago. The Internet, for example, provides an opportunity to present information in an attractive and, these days, accessible way for young people, especially students. There are many more learning programs in our schools about the justice system and how it works, and about our courts. This is making the justice system and awareness of it more accessible for students. Students are also undertaking tours of our courts as well as of the parliament these days.

What I have tried to do in the justice portfolio is reach out to young people at their own level. The Internet has given us a pathway and some creative minds have come up with an attractive web site, which I launched during Youth Week this year. It is a new resource for young people

about legal issues and the role of the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. It encourages students to take a guided tour that looks at the history of our justice system and explains the way it works. The web site has four parts: a part talking about the courts; a part talking about 'you and the law'; a section on crime and justice; and a section on justice for Queenslanders.

I think the web site is a great innovation and a valuable resource for Queensland students. One of the reasons it works so well is that it was developed with the input of students. The feedback we have been getting since the site was launched suggests that young people are finding it informative and educational, as well as fun to use.

I am pleased our courts are also becoming more accessible to tours for students. For example, during Youth Week there were guided tours of the Supreme Court and the District Court complex in Brisbane. These tours coincided with the launch of a new booklet or at least an updated version of the booklet entitled *Our Courts, An Inside Look*. This provides a comprehensive, plain English explanation of the court processes. It has been given to schoolchildren and other visitors to the court complex and can also be accessed on the justice web site.

During Law Week in May, my department contributed material to the Queensland Law Society kits that were also distributed to 1,435 primary schools and 470 high schools throughout the state. These kits provided lesson resources for legal studies teachers.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-3 of the MPS and the reference to new facilities in Brisbane, including the new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex. Could the Attorney outline the construction schedule for these facilities and the difference they will make?

**Mr WELFORD:** The new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex will represent a massive investment in improving the infrastructure of our legal system. It will be a cornerstone for the redevelopment of Queensland Place on the corner of George and Turbot Streets. The government, as you know, has approved funding of up to \$135.5 million for the project. In the coming financial year, funding of \$16.129 million has been allocated to progress the project.

It will provide a major boost to the construction industry and—for the benefit of the member for Southern Downs—we anticipate it will generate some 600 construction jobs. It is part of our government's long-term vision to bring alive this part of the CBD and provide a catalyst for new commercial and retail facilities that will be able to be developed in future surrounding the site. It will also provide an important link between George Street and Roma Street station, the Brisbane Transit Centre and the Roma Street Parkland.

The courts building will also complement the existing infrastructure in George Street and Roma Street as an area which will be developed as the city's major legal precinct. It will mean a better and purpose-built facility for all participants in our court system, allowing us to replace the existing, overcrowded Magistrates Courts centre at North Quay, which was first occupied more than 20 years ago.

In terms of a construction schedule, we expect to begin excavation work in September this year, with construction proper getting under way early in 2003. The building work should be complete by about mid-2004, with court services to commence in the second half of that year. As I say, this will be a state-of-the-art complex and one of the best Magistrates Courts facilities in Australia, with at least 17 fully operational Magistrates Courts and a capacity for a further 14 courts as the system expands and demand increases. It will have two fully functional Coroners Courts, at least four chambers hearing rooms, four courtrooms for small claims, secured day detention facilities, closed circuit TV facilities for child witnesses and the victims of sexual assault, video conferencing facilities to allow witnesses to provide evidence from remote locations, and facilities throughout the building to assist people with disabilities.

This new complex will utilise not only state-of-the-art facilities in the legal context but also be of significant social benefit to that precinct of our city, and may I say, will—if I have anything to do with it—also utilise the most modern environmental design principles that we can apply to commercial buildings to reduce its energy load and improve the quality of the indoor climate for occupants.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The committee will now adjourn for a tea break.

Sitting suspended from 10.21 a.m. to 10.35 a.m.

**The CHAIR:** I now declare the committee's hearing reopened. I call the member for Burleigh.

**Mrs SMITH:** On page 1-3 of the MPS there is a reference to the planned program of improving court facilities in Mackay, Cooktown, Caloundra and Thursday Island. Could the Attorney outline the plans for these new and refurbished courthouses?

**Mr WELFORD:** We are committed to improving access to justice by providing modern and efficient court facilities, particularly in regional areas of the state. Our government will be spending \$39 million over the next 12 months on a program to modernise our state's courts. This funding will underwrite capital and technological improvements in the courts. The project at Mackay courthouse is the largest of the four projects the member referred to and will result in a complete upgrade to this historic building as well as an extension. The design for the project commenced in October last year. Plans were released for public comment in late May at a public meeting in Mackay. Excavation will begin, I understand, in August and construction of a new extension will be completed in November 2003. We expect court services to be provided in the new wing of the Mackay courthouse by the end of next year. The second stage of the Mackay project will refurbish the existing historic building, and that should be completed by October 2004. Total funding is about \$11.4 million and we expect that it will generate about 7,300 person weeks of employment during construction. In Cooktown, we are spending \$650,000 extending the courthouse. That courthouse is 65 years old. It will result in improved public areas and office space, more interview rooms, provision of child witness facilities and domestic violence interviewing rooms. The increased capacity will also enable a QGAP, Queensland Government Agent Program, office to provide enhanced and more efficient services to the local community. Preliminary designs for Cooktown have been prepared and work should be completed by July next year. In Caloundra the focus at this stage is simply planning for the replacement of the existing courthouse. We have allocated \$400,000 in the coming year for this purpose. We have purchased land adjacent to the Caloundra police station, and master planning for a courthouse has commenced. The new facilities at Thursday Island are an example of our government's commitment to improving facilities and services in the far north. The existing courthouse on Thursday Island is almost 70 years old and cannot meet the needs of the local people. The building is in poor condition, so the best way to improve the facilities there is for a new courthouse, and that is what we are doing. The total project on Thursday Island will cost \$2.4 million with a view to construction in 2004-05.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I refer the minister to page 2-7 of the MPS and the implementation of the electoral reforms emanating from the government's Restoring Integrity initiatives. Could the minister outline what practical measures the commission will be taking in regard to these changes?

**Mr WELFORD:** The reforms in the Electoral Act amendments this year deliver on commitments made by the Premier in Barcaldine last year to clean up Queensland's electoral system. They give Queensland the strongest and most transparent electoral system in Australia, as I have said previously. As part of the reform process, the Electoral Commission is implementing a wide-ranging community awareness program. This program is targeting particular groups, such as older Queenslanders, young people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, our ethnic community and rural and remote Queenslanders. One of the key objectives is to promote ongoing awareness of electoral matters between elections, particularly in the need to be continuously enrolled to vote. The program is using a variety of press and radio advertising, posters and other material as well as public relations activities. The commission's web site is also being significantly revised. As part of our electoral reforms, the commission has been empowered to audit preselection ballots conducted by registered political parties. Model procedures for the conduct of the ballots have been finalised and the commission is preparing internal procedures for the conduct of audits. Under the reforms, all parties must revise their constitutions to meet principles of free and democratic elections. These revisions must be given to the commission by 6 December this year or the party will be liable for deregistration.

Another important component of the reforms will be data matching for enrolment validation. This will involve data held by government entities being made available to the commission and, where appropriate, passed to the Australian Electoral Commission for roll updates under the joint role arrangement. Negotiations about processes required for this data sharing have commenced between our state government agencies including, for example, the departments of education and housing. Other elements of the reform package include disclosure provisions which require returns from broadcasters, publishers, parties and candidates' donors; a requirement for detailed records to be kept on loans made to parties and candidates other than those from recognised financial institutions; and how-to-vote cards intended for distribution in a state election on polling day will have to be registered with the commission seven days before polling day. Any financial

arrangements relating to preference allocation will have to be advised to the commission, and ongoing funding of \$500,000 each year has been provided to the commission for these enhanced arrangements. All registered political parties have been briefed on these matters by the commission.

**The CHAIR:** I refer the Attorney to page 2-6 of the MPS and to the Electoral Commission's ballot paper survey in relation to the 2001 state general election. Could the Attorney explain what the survey found?

**Mr WELFORD:** The survey in relation to the 2001 election showed that a majority of Queenslanders have embraced optional preferential voting. It shows that voters are increasingly endorsing the reason why optional preferential voting was introduced—that voters should not be forced into voting for candidates they do not support. A ballot paper survey is standard practice after each state general election and provides the commission with valuable information.

Following the state election in February 2001, the Electoral Commission engaged Dr Paul Reynolds from the University of Queensland to undertake the ballot paper survey. The objectives of this survey were to investigate the incidence and nature of informal voting, examine patterns of voter response to the modes of voting under optional preferential voting, map the flow of preferences, establish the rates at which voters followed candidate how-to-vote cards and analyse the difference in voting responses between extraordinary and ordinary votes. Districts chosen included a range of those won by each of the parties represented in the current parliament as well as one won by an Independent member. Other selection criteria included numbers of candidates, whether or not the district went to preferences, and demographic categorisations of urban, provincial and rural. The sample size was statistically significant, with 264,630 ballot papers examined. That represents 12.55 per cent of the ballot papers cast in the election. The key findings were, firstly, that informal voting rose for the first time since 1992. The survey hypothesis for this increase is that One Nation supporters were more likely to cast an informal vote if there was no One Nation candidate contesting the seat. Secondly, optional preferential voting is supported in the electorate by a factor of two to one. Thirdly, a substantial number of voters ignore the how-to-vote instructions given by parties where the party recommends a full preference distribution. Fourthly, it shows that Queensland has moved a considerable distance in the direction of a de facto first-past-the-post system.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-23 of the MPS and the reference to the commencement of court sittings at Badu Island. Could the Attorney advise the committee what steps are being taken to train JPs on Badu Island so they can eventually constitute their own court?

**Mr WELFORD:** I thank the member for this question, because it raises a significant shift in the approach to the delivery of justice services in Queensland. The first ever magistrate's court convened by local indigenous justices of the peace will sit on remote Badu Island in the Torres Strait next week. This is a significant milestone for the people of Badu Island. This initiative gives the local community a much greater sense of ownership and participation in the justice system. It is particularly the case in a place like Badu Island, one of the most remote communities in Australia. It has a population of about 1,300 people and is located 40 kilometres north of Thursday Island. The establishment of the court is part of our government's initiative to improve access to justice for indigenous people, particularly those living in these remote communities. The way it works is that two or more of the local JPs can constitute a Magistrates Court and deal with matters including bail applications, simple offences, by-laws and traffic matters. It is an approach that empowers remote communities. It gives them a greater sense of responsibility and it allows the local community to manage breaches of the law much more effectively. Of course, it is also an important part of our government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Justice Agreement with ATSI people.

We have allocated an additional \$800,000 in the current budget to expand the network of Magistrates Courts that can be constituted by indigenous people. There is an ongoing program of JP training in place for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout Cape York. There are three stages of training provided before local indigenous courts can commence. This is followed up by regular further training to ensure the courts operate successfully. Badu Island will be a good example of how this training works.

A trainer from the JPs branch of my department conducted training on Badu Island on two separate weeks in November last year and again in February this year. We now have six participants sworn in as JPs of the Magistrates Court on 13 June this year and another two will be ready to take their oath of office shortly. As well as having a capability to constitute a Magistrates

Court the JPs also play an important role in helping their communities with basic legal procedures and passing on an understanding of the justice system generally. We have so far established Magistrates Courts constituted by local indigenous JPs in communities such as Woorabinda, Hope Vale, Wujal Wujal, Kowanyama, Bamaga, Yarrabah, Pompuraaw and Thursday Island.

**The CHAIR:** That is the end of the period for government members' questions.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** As the minister responsible for the Electoral Act, you would be aware of claims this morning that your disgraced former colleague and convicted paedophile Bill D'Arcy renewed his membership of the Labor Party on 25 March this year for the party's minimum fee of \$20 as he is a prisoner and the fee is based on a person's capacity to earn. I have no particular knowledge of the accuracy of this claim other than the reports I have read, but considering as the overseer of the Queensland Electoral Act you have made much of your recent electoral reforms that you have said will clean up the recent mess which we have seen in the system in Queensland, can you clarify what provisions are in your laws to stop convicted paedophiles or, for that matter, other serious criminals from possessing membership of political parties? If there is no prohibition on membership for such people, will you give a commitment today to fix the law so that there will be and thus engender some faith in the political process for the people of Queensland who believe that these types of people should not be eligible to be members of political parties?

**Mr WELFORD:** Firstly, let me make it clear that I am not aware of whether Mr D'Arcy has renewed his membership or not renewed his membership of the Labor Party or any other party or organisation. As the honourable member says, neither he nor I have any personal evidence of that fact or otherwise. The general proposition as to whether people in prison should be able to join political parties or not is not one that has been addressed in the legislation that I have introduced. The reason for that is that the legislation that our government has introduced has been focusing on the integrity of the electoral system, not the integrity of individuals who cast votes or participate in political parties in the electoral system, except so far as their participation reflects upon the integrity of that system. The effect of our changes has been very strongly to make it clear that anyone who participates in an electoral process within a political party or in the electoral system generally for the voting for candidates or in state or local government elections in a way that undermines or commits in effect a fraud on the public of Queensland through improperly manipulating those electoral processes will be disqualified from participating in the system, including in political parties.

It does not mean that anyone and everyone who goes to jail is disqualified from participating in the processes overseen by our electoral laws. On the contrary, one of the things that our electoral laws do not do is disqualify prisoners from having the right to vote. We in this country, unlike some, recognise that although a person is properly to be punished for their crimes we do not deprive them of every human right. The right to vote is one still exercised by most members of the prison community. It is true that the nature of the offences that a person commits is in some cases much more heinous than others. If the honourable member wants to make an argument that for certain offences the basic human right to participate in the electoral system should also be withdrawn from people who go to prison, that is an argument he is welcome to prosecute and there can be public discussion about that. But at this stage that is not part of our law and it was not part of the purpose for which our amendments were introduced. I do not think I can say any further than that.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Further to that issue, as I understand it, the people who have been sentenced to terms of five years or more are unable to participate in the voting process—and I stand to be corrected on that if that is not the case. Also, I think you indicated that the electoral laws which you passed do place a bar on people participating if they have been convicted of electoral fraud-type offences and for that I commend you; that was very much in line with our policy. But the issue here is the integrity of the political process and the fact that the community at large does not subscribe to the view that people who have been convicted of particularly heinous and revolting-type crimes—and we only have to look at the way that paedophilia is sticking in the community psyche at the moment—should be able to participate. What I am saying is: do you believe political parties themselves should put in place a bar on the membership of such people?

**Mr WELFORD:** I have not considered that matter until now. The honourable member raises it in the context of a budget estimates hearing. That is a question of policy that obviously the government would be prepared to consider. It has not been raised with me until now. You have not raised it in the parliament previously. As you say, people who are convicted of offences for which they receive a custodial sentence of five years or more are not entitled to enrol or vote; for



less than five years voting rights are still retained. Whether in addition to the withdrawal of voting rights people should be prohibited from membership of various organisations is something that we have not considered. But it certainly would not be inconsistent with the existing principles in the act that they do not have a right to vote. If one does not have a right to vote in general elections, I would not have any particular objection to amending the law to deprive them of the right to vote in party elections. Regardless of the accuracy or otherwise of the assertion you made in respect of the particular prisoner, it is pretty unlikely that there will be any effective participation by him in the Labor Party.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I turn the attention of the Attorney-General to page 1-24 of the MPS and to dot point 3 under 'Future developments', which indicates that a new fee structure will be introduced in the Supreme and District Courts to differentiate individuals from corporations and will result in fees and the level of the cost recovery of the higher courts in Queensland being consistent with that of other Australian jurisdictions. That indicates that you semi-believe in the battlers, that is, you will be looking at a system whereby people may be able to pay fees based on their capacity to pay, but you give no indication whatsoever of the methodology for that. Given the fact that the Public Trustee, which does a good job, has introduced a new fee structure—no doubt at your behest—which has raised an extra 120 per cent during the year, which you say may be a Robin Hood exercise of giving some back or keeping some, what sorts of indications are there that we can believe you when you say that it will not be above CPI and that the battlers, the low income earners, will not be impacted detrimentally by this new structure?

**Mr WELFORD:** The primary increases in fees mentioned in the MPS are increases in filing fees for the initiation of matters in the District and Supreme Courts for civil matters primarily. There is no impact on battlers who appear in those courts in criminal matters. Of course, most of the battlers of whom you speak are making their claims or having their claims dealt with in the Magistrates Court. It is true that the fee increases in the District and Supreme Courts will be greater than the CPI increase. On the other hand, those fees have not been increased, in some cases, for nearly a decade or more, so an increase is not surprising. In determining how to set the increase there were two factors that I took into account. Firstly, I looked at the arrangements in other states where corporations are clearly paying higher fees than individuals. I have reflected that through the new arrangements that will apply in our District and Supreme Courts. Secondly, I looked at the range of fees applied in courts in other states. If my memory serves me correctly, the fees that we will set in Queensland still see Queensland among the least expensive, that is, only the second or third least expensive, courts to access anywhere in Australia. We are still well below New South Wales and Victoria, which in the commercial sphere are appropriate comparisons for Queensland courts to make. This will allow us to maintain the accessibility to the courts in terms of the timeliness with which matters are dealt with and to also ensure that justice is delivered promptly. As you indicate, there are mechanisms that allow for a waiver of fees to be granted. That exemption is provided for under the uniform civil procedure rules and the decision is made by the registrar, not by me.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Is it possible for us to actually garner for ourselves a copy of the new fee structure which is proposed and some sort of indication of the principles which you are considering insofar as reducing the impact on low-income earners, because whilst it is true that low-income earners tend to use the lower jurisdictions it is also true that they sometimes face an uphill battle in fighting large corporations through the higher courts as they tend to exercise the appeal rights and other rights because they are financially well heeled enough to do so? We would like to have some further assurances on that particular issue.

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes. I think the concern the honourable member raises is entirely legitimate. Clearly, we do not want the filing fees in the Supreme and District Courts to be set in such a way as to deprive people of access to justice where justice needs to be done. That is why there is a procedure for exemption to be granted from the payment of fees under the existing rules of court which apply to both the Supreme and District Courts. In 2000-01 there were 13 applications made for exemption to the registrar. Five of those were granted and five were refused. Two of the applicants whose requests were refused have appealed the decision and are awaiting judgment of the court. The mechanism in place will guarantee that people who are genuinely in need can obtain a waiver. Those processes are overseen by the court so that no-one with a genuine case but an incapacity to pay the fees is deprived of access to the court.

As I say, although the fees will be increased, they will still be at a level which will be significantly below those in other states. If the honourable member would like some more details, I can give them now, but the fees are published. They are published in the *Gazette*. They have to

be obviously because legal firms need to know what the filing fees are. So those fees will be published in the *Gazette*.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I look forward to receiving that additional information, including the quantum of the amount of additional money which the state believes it will raise. I turn the Attorney's attention to pages 1-45 and 1-49 of the portfolio statement, particularly dot point 2 on page 1-49 under 'Statement of financial performance'. My question relates to the Land and Resources Tribunal, which seems to me to have been the absolute best job you could have possibly got in Queensland over the last couple of years because it has had absolutely nothing to do. Can you give an indication to this committee about how many cases have actually gone before this tribunal and the cost of running the tribunal. Isn't this proof that this state based regime has been an absolute failure because of the matters which have not been able to make it let alone be determined before this tribunal?

**Mr WELFORD:** The honourable member is absolutely right about this tribunal being well resourced and underactive in terms of the caseload that has come before it. That is not entirely the court's fault nor the government's fault, for reasons that I will explain. In essence, let me start with some facts and figures. At the start of 2001-02—that is, the last financial year—it had 59 cases in rough terms. During the previous year it received 143 cases and during 2001-02 it received a further 103 cases—that is, the last financial year. The number of matters completed were 86 in 2000-01 and 101 in 2001-02. At the end of this last financial year, it had 61 matters on hand. So it has had, as you can see, a couple of hundred matters go before it. Most of them are not major matters, however. As a result, it has maintained a pretty good record in disposing of them.

For example, in 2000-01 when it first received 143 matters it finalised 92 per cent of them within six months. Last financial year it finalised 66 per cent within six months, although there were some issues beyond the control of the tribunal that contributed to that. I think they related to issues that result in negotiations between the parties. In the last financial year, as I say, it had 66 per cent of matters finalised within six months and had hearings for 49 per cent of matters within three weeks of receiving the application. So you can get very quick justice done in the Land and Resources Tribunal. The major factor that is currently affecting the tribunal's workload is the recent decision of the Federal Court overturning the Commonwealth Attorney-General's determination which authorised the implementation of the native title state provisions in Queensland.

The state provisions which we legislated here need to be authorised by the Commonwealth by a statutory determination of the Commonwealth Attorney-General. That determination was made but has since been found to be invalid. Consequently, major matters that would otherwise come before our Land and Resources Tribunal under those state provisions cannot validly be brought there currently, which leaves our Land and Resources Tribunal high and dry in terms of dealing with those matters. The government is currently discussing with the mining industry how to overcome that impediment and, as I understand it, the Commonwealth has instituted an appeal against that Federal Court decision. But, pending that, we are working with the mining industry to look at other ways to address the issues it has raised.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I have a further question with regard to this particular matter. It appears to me that, notwithstanding the litigation issue you have just mentioned, those Australian jurisdictions which have followed or largely reflected and worked under the Commonwealth Native Title Act have had a far more expeditious decision on their matter through the National Native Title Tribunal and that this state based regime, whilst it may seek to preserve the sovereignty and self-determination of Queensland, has not as expeditiously delivered a timely outcome for those people wishing to explore and develop mineral resources or those people wishing to have land rights matters determined. When are you going to start the review process to ensure the resources are more commensurate with the workload that it is actually doing? Are you considering doing away with the state based regime and actually falling in line with the national regime, which seems to be providing better outcomes?

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not know what the comparative time lines are between the time it takes to resolve matters under the national process as compared to the time lines that have been taken to resolve matters in the Land and Resources Tribunal, except to say that we did not introduce our native title state provisions simply for the edification of our government and, for that matter, the Queensland parliament. We introduced them entirely in response to concerns from the mining industry that the Commonwealth provisions would allow too long a time to allow matters to progress through the various approval stages. That is why our state provisions in fact provided for

a more truncated and a more efficient process for resolving the negotiation process on native title for new mining proposals.

Whether in fact in the outcome the state provisions have been more or less cumbersome than the national ones I am not sure, but the government is open to discussion with the mining industry about where it wants to go given the recent collapse of the Commonwealth's determination approving the state provisions. If it transpires that the mining industry would prefer to use a Commonwealth process, then obviously we will respond to that at the appropriate time. But the intention of the native title state provisions that we introduced and the investment we made in a Land and Resources Tribunal specifically to serve them were entirely in order to do what our government could do to protect the state economy and encourage investment in mining in our state.

**The CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired.

**Mrs SMITH:** I refer to page 5-4 of the MPS and the reference to a client needs and access survey in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. What actions has Legal Aid undertaken as a result of that survey to improve legal services for these communities?

**Mr WELFORD:** We have discussed this morning a number of issues relating to the provision of legal services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and the problems of those communities in Cape York and the gulf have been identified in a number of studies such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence and the Cape York Justice Study recently undertaken by Justice Fitzgerald. The Legal Aid Queensland study was focused primarily on the legal needs of indigenous women. Its aim was to identify the type of legal services required in remote indigenous communities and the best way of making those services available.

In November last year I launched the *Northern outreach* report which detailed the findings of the Legal Aid survey. It identified the legal service needs, current service delivery and barriers to justice experienced by indigenous people in remote locations. The findings of that report have been used as a basis for Legal Aid Queensland's initiative in the integrated indigenous strategy. That strategy is contributing to the 10-year plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders implemented by the government as a whole. It is also part of our response to the Cape York justice strategy, particularly with regard to the proposed training for community justice groups and indigenous JPs.

As a result of the Legal Aid survey, a Cape and Gulf Outreach Service has been established to assist victims of violent crime, many of whom are women. Two solicitors have been employed based in Cairns and Townsville to make regular trips to the cape and gulf communities, to Palm Island and to Thursday Island. The solicitors provide legal assistance in general law as well as advice in civil and family law matters. Since the outreach service began late last year, there have been over 300 client contacts made with the service and 68 criminal injuries compensation files have been opened. Over the next 12 months the solicitor serving the cape will visit each designated community at least three times during the year. Initial visits to communities are focused on building contacts with them and with relevant service providers in those communities. A similar level of service is to be provided in the gulf communities as well as Thursday Island and Palm Island. Overall, the initial results have been positive, with use of the service increasing. I expect it will gain even stronger community support in the coming year.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Page 5-4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements lists some achievements of Legal Aid Queensland. Could the Attorney explain whether the use of telephone advice by Legal Aid has had any benefit?

**Mr WELFORD:** In addition to the matters I have just discussed, Legal Aid is doing great work in Queensland. Around Australia the other Legal Aid Offices in other jurisdictions regard our Legal Aid Office as one of the most effective and most efficient in the country. It certainly provides services well beyond the range of services that are available to citizens in other parts of Australia. So we have a lot to be proud of with the initiative taken by the leadership team at Legal Aid Queensland.

The initiative in relation to telephone advice is again another initiative that has been introduced following the additional \$2.5 million our government allocated to Legal Aid last year which will be of real benefit to people living in regional areas. Of course, it has been a direct response to Legal Aid's consultation with its various constituency users and consumers as to what

is needed in terms of legal assistance. So it means that Queenslanders, regardless of where they are, now have easy access to legal advice for the cost of a local phone call.

This telephone legal assistance service commenced on a trial basis in October 1999. In the past 12 months it has been expanded statewide, serving 14,000 people with legal advice. Indeed, about 22 per cent of all legal advice is given by Legal Aid in the year. The feedback has been extremely positive, and Legal Aid Queensland has decided to make the service permanently available statewide. Of course, it is easy to access, and for the cost of a local call to a 1300 number. A customer service officer takes the call, and then a solicitor telephones back to provide the advice that the consumer requires. As I said, the feedback from consumers of Legal Aid services has been very, very positive, particularly for people who need urgent advice, such as women with child care responsibilities. They also report feeling comfortable talking about their legal problems over the phone and being able to talk about it from their home rather than having to come into an office somewhere. That allows people to discuss their legal problems in a more relaxed and less pressured environment.

The telephone legal advice is a major strategy for managing the high demand on Legal Aid for legal advice, as well. Because it can be delivered at a fraction of the cost of face-to-face legal advice, it enables Legal Aid to reach more people so that, in the last financial year, it provided 63,785 legal advices across the state—a 6.5 per cent increase on the previous financial year.

**The CHAIR:** I refer you to page 1-32 of the MPS and the management of the state's network of over 70,000 JPs. Could you explain what initiatives are being taken to keep JPs up to date with current legislation and to make them more accessible to the public?

**Mr WELFORD:** Justices of the peace and commissioners for declarations play an important role in our communities. For that reason it is important our JPs are accessible to Queenslanders. Unlike other states, we have some 70,000 JPs across the state. Some of them we cannot find, because since registering they have either moved on and not re-enrolled in Queensland or they have moved on somewhere else. This is a big problem in terms of keeping JPs up to date with their responsibilities and roles.

There is another problem, despite the fact that we have so many JPs in comparison to other states. For example, I understand that in Victoria, with a population larger than ours, they have fewer than 15,000 JPs who perform the function, it seems, quite adequately in that state. The constant complaint that I am sure many of us, especially members of parliament, receive is that whenever you want to find a JP you cannot find one, despite the fact that we have more per head of population than just about any other state. So I have moved to try to address this problem with a new Internet directory of JPs. It is not compulsory, but I am encouraging all JPs to sign up to have their names and telephone numbers—nothing else, no other disclosing private information—put on a local area directory that people can access on the Internet. In that way any Queenslanders with access to the Net can search the Justice Department web site for a JP in their local area, whether it be Thursday Island, Coolangatta or west of Longreach. We have about 3,000 JPs and commissioners for declarations who have already listed on the web site. That is a good thing. We are trying to add more every day, and I encourage all members of parliament who come in contact with JPs to encourage their JPs to list on the register. Contact details are available only about those JPs who have actually given permission.

We expect there will be some improvements to the web site not only in terms of the list of JPs available but also information about the role of JPs and commissioners for declarations over the coming year. The web site, as well as other mechanisms that we can develop to improve the education process for JPs, is something I am very keen to progress. We have a dedicated JPs branch within the department, as members may know, which provides ongoing training for JPs and commissioners for declarations. Occasionally I even try to get along to a regional training session myself. We have had 10 seminars in the last 12 months, and there are also specialist training sessions for indigenous JPs conducted, as I have previously indicated.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer you to page 1-25 of the MPS and the plan to introduce drug diversion in the Brisbane Magistrates Court. Could the Attorney explain the timetable for the scheme, how it will be funded and who will be eligible?

**Mr WELFORD:** Drug diversion within the Magistrates Court is a separate program to the existing drug court trial, of which we have spoken earlier today. The new program will have strict eligibility criteria and give offenders a chance to get their lives back on track. It is part of the Queensland Drug Strategic Framework, an approach we are taking on a whole-of-government basis not just in the Justice Department but also in the Police Department, whereby people who

have committed drug offences can be diverted to rehabilitation at an early stage. Whereas the drug court trial allows drug rehabilitation orders to be made affecting people who are about to go to jail for their drug offences, the broader program of drug diversion which we plan to introduce applies to anyone who has been apprehended for a drug offence, subject to strict criteria which I will outline in a moment.

The final level of funding for this diversion program is yet to be decided, but a portion of the funding is coming from the Commonwealth under its national illicit drugs program. It will be conducted at the Brisbane Magistrates Court and the Childrens Court for up to 12 months and will include all drugs. The trial will give people charged with possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use the chance of rehabilitation through drug education and treatment. It aims to divert people to counselling or treatment under a recognisance before they become addicted to drugs and commit more serious crimes to pay for their habit. It will fill the gap between police diversion, where police divert first-time offenders in possession of small amounts of cannabis, on one hand and the drug courts, which divert chronic addicted addicts of serious drugs, on the other. To be eligible, though, a person must admit their guilt to possession of a drug in the small quantity that will be specified in the legislation. They must be assessed as suitable for a drug intervention program, and they must not have been convicted of or have a charge pending for a disqualifying offence. Now, a disqualifying offence will include an offence of violence or a sexual offence. Our government is currently giving careful consideration to how we determine the small quantity of drugs in possession for personal use. Establishing that the drug was for personal use is important to ensuring that diversion is not offered obviously to unsuitable offenders. If they fail to complete the treatment requirements they will be returned to court for sentence on the original offence.

**Mrs SMITH:** On page 1-23 of the MPS there is a reference to alternative dispute resolution. Can you outline the benefits of the fast-track resolution service known as abbreviated mediation and advise where this service and the more standard mediation services are available?

**Mr WELFORD:** I am a strong advocate of ADR not only within our court system but for the resolution of disputes generally in the commercial environment and in the community. Part of the reason for ADR being popular, of course, is that it helps people avoid the formalities and costs of court proceedings, and it can save time and money. In the past financial year there were some 2,246 mediations conducted throughout Queensland under our ADR program throughout the state, and 80 per cent to 90 per cent of these mediations reached agreement. So it is a very effective way of resolving conflict within the community. Because the parties work out the settlements for themselves, the commitment to the outcome is also strong. And unlike a court proceeding, you generally succeed with a win-win outcome rather than one party going away disaffected.

In the Small Claims Tribunal and minor debts courts we are now using an innovative process which, as you mentioned, is called abbreviated mediation. This is a similar ADR service but designed to fast-track the resolution of those disputes in those forums. Over the past year we have held more than 1,100 abbreviated mediations, which is 50 per cent of all the mediations that we have conducted. This allows disputing parties to reach a mutually acceptable resolution of matters which they bring before the Small Claims Tribunal or minor debts court. Evidence from court staff and magistrates suggests that even if a matter does not settle through the abbreviated mediation process it can generally be dealt with more effectively when it does get to the Small Claims Tribunal and minor debts court. This is because the mediation helps clarify the issues in dispute and narrow the issues that need to be resolved by the tribunals themselves. The abbreviated mediation service which is provided to the Magistrates Court has been extended now to Ipswich and Southport. There are a number of other centres where it also is currently offered, for example, in Cairns, Townsville, Proserpine, Mackay, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Maryborough, Hervey Bay, Maroochydore, Toowoomba and Brisbane.

With respect to the standard mediation services, the ADR branch in my department has a solid statewide focus with dispute resolution centres in Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Hervey Bay and Brisbane. Over half of the standard mediations were performed outside south-east Queensland in the last financial year. We have now made information available about the mediation services that people can access through the Magistrates Court on the web site of the Department of Justice.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I refer the Attorney to page 5-4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and the partnership that Legal Aid Queensland is involved with in regard to the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House. Could the Attorney please outline how this pro bono system works?

**Mr WELFORD:** The Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House, or QPILCH, marks a new approach to the coordination of pro bono legal work in our state. It is the result of a very positive partnership between Legal Aid Queensland, community legal centres, the Queensland Law Society, the bar association, Griffith University and some private legal firms. All of these groups are working together with the same goal, namely, to help Queenslanders access legal representation. QPILCH will bridge a gap between those who cannot afford private legal services and those who, by the means test, cannot access legal aid. If a person has a legal problem and cannot afford a private lawyer but is ineligible for legal aid, they can be referred to QPILCH or approach it directly for assistance.

There are, of course, some criteria that QPILCH must use in order to determine whether a person is eligible to access its services. The applicant, for example, must not be eligible for legal aid. The applicant must be in a financial position whereby they cannot easily afford private legal services. The request must relate to a matter of public interest. In other words, it must relate to an issue of law or policy that raises matters of broader public concern than the individual concern of the person involved; for example, a kind of issue that would affect disadvantaged or marginalised groups in the community. Obviously the request has to also relate to a matter that an appropriate legal remedy can resolve. There is no point QPILCH taking on causes if the legal system is not the appropriate forum to resolve them and some other response is appropriate.

If the request comes within those guidelines, QPILCH matches the applicant with a member law firm or barrister with expertise in the area that the application involves. A number of Brisbane's large law firms have come on board as foundation partners, and I have given strong endorsement to their participation in the program. I have urged all our law firms, particularly the larger ones and those in regional Queensland, to get involved to help meet this important legal need. The assistance will not be limited only to court cases or litigation. It will include the full range of legal work, from giving advice and opinions through to drafting documents and providing mediation in legal projects.

QPILCH will be an independent office that will match cases with skilled lawyers, and the assistance will be available both to individuals and, I think of particular interest, to community organisations. It is not within the Department of Justice. It is an independent organisation that has our strong support. Cases that are taken on a pro bono basis must be in the public interest and affect a number of people or raise matters of public concern. QPILCH is funded by its own membership fees—that is, the member law firms and participating institutions—a small grant from my department and in-kind contributions from its members who volunteer their services.

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

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I refer you to strategic issues on page 1-2 and matters that you consider as overall policy objectives of government. Do you have any plans to review or revoke the current law relating to the defence of provocation which exists in Queensland for people who may have committed a serious crime such as murder? What would you believe of such a proposal?

**Mr WELFORD:** There have been discussions over a long period of time as to appropriate amendments that might or should be made to the defence of provocation in relation to offences of murder. This particularly arose, as I understand it, in the Task Force on Women and the Criminal Code. Those matters have already been given some consideration by the previous Attorney-General. There are still some issues in relation to the implications for women and the Criminal Code to which I am giving attention. I have at this stage not put as a priority this year addressing any reforms of the Criminal Code relating to the defence of provocation. It is not something that I have discounted as a matter not worthy of further consideration, but it is not a priority this year.

**Mr FLYNN:** It will come as no surprise that my questions today are based around the issue of fine defaulters, as I have pursued you somewhat zealously over the last year on the issue. You have to a degree been equally zealous in managing to avoid answering the questions I have asked you. Earlier you used the term 'minor offenders' in relation to people who took advantage of the amnesty. Most people seem to think that fine offenders are convicted of simple offences and that the police go around gathering up those who have forgotten to renew their drivers licence or run a red light, when in fact fines are imposed for extremely serious indictable offences. It was to those I was referring when I suggested there should be no leeway at all in the payment of fines. Rather than being granted an amnesty, they should in fact not pass go and go straight to jail. In your answer to part 2 of question 9 on notice you referred to SPER. My question was not about SPER; it was about matters given to the court to make a decision that serious offenders

should go to jail rather than pay a fine. Do you acknowledge that serious offenders are in fact taking advantage of this amnesty?

**Mr WELFORD:** First let me say to the honourable member for Lockyer that, notwithstanding his impression, I have not intentionally sought to avoid answering the questions he has raised in parliament throughout the year. It may be that we have been speaking at cross-purposes. Even in his question on notice reference is made to fines imposed for minor offences. I now understand the point he is making. His interest is not in those minor offences for which fines are imposed; his concern is how we should deal with those offenders who have fines imposed for more serious offences.

**Mr FLYNN:** Yes.

**Mr WELFORD:** I understand his point about not allowing leeway. I think the proper policy approach to these issues is to accept that, regardless of the nature of an offence a person has committed, the decision of the court is to impose a fine. So the first priority government should have is to ensure that that fine is paid. You would be well aware that historically, going back a decade and more, the efforts of government to pursue those fines and have them paid have been pretty pitiful. It has only been in the last decade or so, through first the SETONS process and now the SPER process, that we are becoming more sophisticated in our procedures for following up those fines and having them paid.

In the past, the only enforcement mechanism that was available—and usually police officers were required to pursue it—was to arrest a person for an unpaid fine and imprison them. Although there were some serious offenders amongst those fine defaulters, a large proportion of them were not serious offenders. I am sure the member would agree that it makes absolutely no sense at all to clog our prison system. Previously, up to 25 per cent of those entering prison were mere fine defaulters. That is not to discount the nature of the penalty or the offence that was committed, but the first priority is to recover the fine.

We are gradually ratcheting up the subsequent measures that will be imposed to address fine defaulters if they do not pay their fine, and that will ultimately include the last resort option of arrest and imprisonment. So I want to assure the honourable member that there is no go-soft approach in dealing with fine defaulters. We will pursue the fine through every appropriate mechanism, and if it is not paid people will as a last resort regrettably still face a prison sentence. Of course, if they breach their court order then ultimately it is still a matter for the court to impose any further penalty.

**Mr FLYNN:** You have gone some way towards answering the question. I will take up the issue with you at a later date. I refer to the amnesty. Are you able to tell me how much money was owed on the warrants as existed then and how much has been recovered in the intervening period of the money that was originally owed?

**Mr WELFORD:** Could you just clarify what you mean by 'then'?

**Mr FLYNN:** A number of warrants were cancelled at the beginning of the amnesty. Those warrants reflected a certain sum of money. What was that sum and how much of it has been recovered as a result of the amnesty?

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not think any warrants were actually cancelled as such. At the beginning of the amnesty we allowed—

**Mr FLYNN:** In your answer to question 9 you actually said—

On that date 460,573 warrants were cancelled.

**Mr WELFORD:** I apologise. At the time the amnesty was implemented the warrants were cancelled in the sense that they ceased to be effective to be acted upon for the period of the amnesty.

**Mr FLYNN:** You mean 'recalled' rather than 'cancelled', then?

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes. The amnesty itself collected about \$6.1 million. For the period from February to November—that is, up to the start of the amnesty in November—we collected about 11 per cent, or \$6.2 million. During the amnesty we collected another \$6.1 million.

**Mr FLYNN:** Could you clarify the amount outstanding at the beginning? I must have missed that if you have said it.

**Mr WELFORD:** I have the number of warrants that were in existence at the beginning. I think I have previously published a dollar figure. I am happy to put it on notice. We just do not have at our fingertips the dollar value of the outstanding warrants, but there were 460,573—

**Mr FLYNN:** You gave the member for Southern Downs the figure of \$97.7 million. Taking away \$6.1 million does not reflect too well on the amnesty, really.

**Mr WELFORD:** The member can make his own judgment about whether the amnesty was effective. We conducted the amnesty and we got in \$6.1 million that we otherwise might not have got. Every government seeks to trial various methods for encouraging people to pay their fines. We trialled an amnesty. We do not currently have a proposal to conduct another amnesty, but in the run-up to the introduction of SPER it was something that was tested to see whether it was effective. As you say, \$6 million out of \$90 million is not a massive response, but we did our best to make the amnesty effective.

**Mr FLYNN:** You say there are warrants that have been issued for existing prisoners, calling in unpaid fines, where fines still outstanding are commuted to a term of imprisonment to be served cumulatively. How many such warrants are in existence and how much money is outstanding as a result of those warrants for unpaid fines by prisoners?

**Mr WELFORD:** I see the answer I gave you in relation to your question on notice. I might have to take on notice the breakdown of that actual dollar amount. I am happy to provide it. I will make sure we follow that up and provide that information to you.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for questions from non-government members has expired. I refer the Attorney-General to page 4-3 of the MPS and the reference to the launch of four key respondent stakeholder booklets by the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland. Could the Attorney-General explain the significance of these booklets?

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes, I did launch four stakeholder booklets on behalf of the Anti-Discrimination Commission down here at parliament in May. Indeed, I recall seeing the member for Southern Downs at the launch. The development of these booklets was one of the key education activities undertaken by the Anti-Discrimination Commission last year. It is a good initiative in that it targets those groups who are the source of most complaints that are received by the commission. The commission's research showed that almost 80 per cent of all discrimination complaints originated from four areas: employers and employees; providers of goods and services, for example, hotels, motels and restaurants; providers of accommodation, for example, hostel owners and real estate agencies; and providers of education services across all sectors. So it makes good sense for the commission to work in partnership and develop strong communication with these groups in an effort to reduce discrimination.

The guides were developed after consultation with these four groups of community members and the guides take into account the types of issues that often arise in complaints that are raised. The booklets themselves are tailored to provide information for each group and to demonstrate how some everyday situations can give rise to discrimination, sexual harassment or racial or religious vilification. The booklets also describe how the act applies to these examples.

I was particularly pleased to see the racial and religious vilification provisions integrated into each of the guides. One of the benefits of this proactive approach to reaching people who are at risk of discrimination or who simply do not realise that they are themselves acting in a discriminatory way is that it is a much more efficient and effective way for the commission to achieve its outcomes. So these booklets underpin an important ongoing partnership between the commission and employers as well as the commission and other groups such as real estate agents and members of Commerce Queensland who are, incidentally, providing the booklets to all of their members.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-3 of the MPS. There is reference there to a planned program to upgrade facilities such as lighting and voice amplification in a number of courthouses, including major upgrades at Townsville and Southport. I know that we have had some prior discussion about some of these aspects, but could you provide us with some further details of the upgrades?

**Mr WELFORD:** Making sure that our court facilities are upgraded so that they are as modern and user friendly as possible has been given a further boost in this budget. As part of our ongoing improvement program for our courthouses, we will be investing a further \$2.76 million this year in general upgrades. These will focus on lighting, as you mentioned, particularly in public areas and courtrooms, and in registry offices. We will be increasing the number of courts that have closed circuit TV. We will be implementing voice amplification systems in some courtrooms so that witnesses, juries, legal representatives and the judiciary can hear questions and evidence in the course of those proceedings.



The department is currently finalising an implementation plan that will specify the locations where these improvements are being undertaken. Some of them have already been identified, but two significant projects are at courthouses at Townsville and Southport. For example, \$400,000 will be invested to replace the roof sheeting insulation and roof structure of the Townsville courthouse—something which has been a concern for a little while with people noticing rain pouring into the building at certain times. Obviously, that creates workplace health and safety hazards as well. So these leaks will be plugged with a new roof on the Townsville courthouse and we will be upgrading electrical fittings and lighting in the building at the same time.

The other significant project in these minor works programs will involve an upgrading of the airconditioning of the Southport courthouse. This will cost nearly three quarters of a million dollars. The chiller plant in the original building is now over 20 years old. It is increasingly experiencing breakdowns, meaning that the building is often poorly ventilated. I understand that the salt air at Southport has played havoc with the airconditioning plant. So we will be upgrading that this year.

**Mrs SMITH:** There is a reference to the Children's Services Tribunal on page 1-7 of the MPS. Can you advise what measures the tribunal has taken to raise awareness about its role?

**Mr WELFORD:** Recently, the tribunal, through its chair, has done great work to expand awareness about its role, particularly to young people. The tribunal, as you may know, was established as an independent body in response to the recommendations of the Ford inquiry. It has the power to review certain decisions of the Department of Families or decisions of the Commission for Children and Young People.

Since the tribunal was established in my portfolio, I have worked with the new chair to encourage awareness raising about its role. Earlier this year, a new information campaign was launched designed to help Queensland children in care understand their legal rights. Every young person in care in Queensland was sent an information brochure titled *A young person's guide to the Childrens Services Tribunal*. The brochure, which is also being provided to organisations working with youth, explains in an easy-to-read and friendly fashion the role of the tribunal and what it can do to protect the legal rights of young people in care. It also outlines how to contact the tribunal and the types of help that the tribunal can give. It points out that the tribunal, while it is less formal than a court, is also capable of making, serious life-changing decisions. The guide was targeted at young people aged between two and 18 years of age and another guide is now being developed for children between aged six and 11. The tribunal has also developed three guides aimed at adult participants. All of the brochures are provided free of charge. They are also available on the department's web site.

All the guides have been developed in conjunction with groups such as Legal Aid Queensland, the Department of Families, the Commission for Children and Young People and the Foster Carers Association of Queensland. Some of the additional funding that we are providing in this year's budget for the tribunal will be used to produce more of these guides as well as fund the development of the additional guides that I have mentioned.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-25 of the MPS and the reference to the extension of the civil registration scheme. Could the Attorney-General please outline what is being planned and what benefits this will have in the court processes?

**Mr WELFORD:** Our Magistrates Courts are at the coalface of the Queensland justice system. Over 90 per cent of people who appear before any court in Queensland appear in the Magistrates Court. So given the workload, it is essential that our Magistrates Courts' practices are as efficient as possible to ensure that cases progress as smoothly as possible.

Information technology systems are playing an increasingly important role in this regard. A good example is the civil registration system, as you have raised, which operates in the Magistrates Court. It is an information technology system based on a mainframe computer that registers civil, small claims and residential tenancies matters. In practice, this means that when someone files a claim, registry staff enter information on the system rather than create a paper file. When actions take place in the course of the case, for example, a notice of defence is lodged or a judgment is passed, the registry staff update the system. This significantly improves the previous manual paper based system, which in big courts like the Brisbane Magistrates Court was very cumbersome and time consuming for staff and clients.

The civil registration system was originally developed in the early 1990s and until recently operated in only 10 of our largest magistrates courts. In 2000-01 the system was extended to another five courts and to a further six in the last financial year. In the coming year, we will extend

the system to operate in a total of 25 courts across the state. It means that by the end of this coming year, 90 per cent of civil matters in the state will be able to be registered on the system.

As well as setting up the system in more locations, we have also made other improvements. For example, we have created an electronic link to the Residential Tenancies Authority bond system. This removes the need for court staff to fax information to the Residential Tenancies Authority when residential claims affecting bonds are filed. In this coming year, the system will be further enhanced by implementing the electronic lodgment of civil matters, which will allow subscribers such as solicitors to lodge claims and requests for judgments electronically.

**The CHAIR:** I take you to page 1-25 of the MPS and the plan of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Branch to provide greater access to culturally appropriate conflict management and dispute resolution services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Could the Attorney-General briefly explain what is planned?

**Mr WELFORD:** The Alternative Dispute Resolution Branch, as we have discussed earlier today, was established 10 years ago. In that time, it has taken a very proactive role in providing access to mediation services to people in our ATSI communities. The services provided to indigenous communities throughout Queensland, including western Queensland and the Torres Strait, involve approximately 30 indigenous mediators, including a full-time indigenous mediation coordinator in Brisbane.

At the moment, there are a number of conflict management and dispute resolution initiatives targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders either under way or planned. For example, a training package is being developed to help mediators improve services to indigenous clients. This identifies the different cultural viewpoints that indigenous people can bring to a mediation process such as an increased use of support people and different concepts of time. At the same time, a review will be conducted of all the ADR training packages to ensure that they meet the special needs of indigenous clients.

Training and indigenous communities often requires an emphasis on face-to-face communication in a relatively informal setting. You simply cannot use complicated IT applications such as Powerpoint presentations. We are also making sure that training manuals are appropriate for people whose first language may not be English. Two post-graduate research projects are currently being undertaken in partnership with the ADR branch. These projects are examining cultural appropriate ADR styles and processes and the projects will be completed by 2004-05.

We are also looking at options to improve mediation services in the Torres Strait and remote communities. Over the next 12 months, there will be consultation with various communities to work out the best methods. Options being considered include a regular circuit to the communities to conduct a number of mediations rather than travelling to a single dispute and training people in communities in conflict management and mediation skills so that they are better able to resolve disputes on their own will continue to be a top priority.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice has expired. I thank the Attorney-General 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. This hearing is now suspended until 1 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 11.59 p.m. to 1 p.m.

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

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

Mr M. Kinnane, Director-General

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

Mr L. Johnson, Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

Mr G. FitzGerald, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

Mr A. Brunner, A/Executive Director, Counter Disaster and Rescue Services

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

Mr G. Taylor, Director, Finance and Asset Services

Mr I. Rector, Director, State Emergency Services

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**The CHAIR:** The next portfolio to be examined is that of the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15 second warning will be given of the expiration of these time limits. The sessional orders require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in their transcript.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland to be open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish, you may make an opening statement, but I would request that you limit it to no more than five minutes.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thanks, Mr Chairman. Members of the Committee, the Beattie Labor government has again provided a record budget to support Queensland's emergency services. The fact that the budget has again exceeded half a billion dollars is a very clear reflection of the importance this government places on protecting Queenslanders across this vast state. It also highlights the invaluable contribution made by our ambulance, fire and counter disaster and rescue personnel, supported by the extraordinary efforts of 85,000 volunteers across the state.

It is not hollow rhetoric to proudly claim that the Department of Emergency Services has had a dynamic past 12 months and is taking positive steps to ensure its viability for the future. The aim is to break down the 'silos' that have previously existed within the DES between the different divisions of the department. This is not just a good management practice which should be carried out in any large organisation; it also ensures the provision of emergency services to all Queenslanders is positively enhanced. This will also continue the development of the department into a more responsive, efficient and effective organisation, which can respond to its many challenges in a coordinated and integrated manner.

There is no better operational example of this than our department's contribution to fighting the large New South Wales bushfires over Christmas and the New Year. Our four task forces sent to New South Wales were stand-alone units, complete with their own support groups including paramedics, communications officers, incident controllers and mechanics. This made the job a lot easier for the New South Wales authorities because they could move our units to wherever the need was greatest at very short notice.

There are many more examples throughout the department where we are breaking down these former silos and creating synergies across all the agencies. That was the prime objective of last year's Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill, to provide a framework to improve coordination, reduce duplication and ensure funds for front-line services—on the ground and at the station services—are planned and spent in a smarter way. This legislation has been a catalyst to examine opportunities to eliminate waste and duplication across the portfolio and to build on the synergies which exist between the operational areas.

The record budget for 2002-03 of \$558.6 million will boost all of the DES's operational arms and further enhance service delivery to Queenslanders. We are committed to an effective, dedicated and professional emergency services outfit. As minister, I am proud that our officers work a seven-day week, 365 days of the year. They are the men and women whom we call on in times of emergency, and I know that they are the best in Australia and are among the best in the world. This record budget will enable us to significantly enhance service delivery to all Queenslanders, no matter where they live, which is vital during this Year of the Outback.

The 2002-03 budget represents an increase in funding of 8.5 per cent on the previous year and brings to \$123.8 million the amount of additional funding allocated to the Emergency Services portfolio by the Beattie government since 1998-99. Particular emphasis has been given to the department's duty of care obligations to volunteers through the Volunteer Support Package, which has been allocated \$18.9 million over four years. This figure includes \$4 million in additional funding, the second instalment of the five-year \$2.5 million training package for the Rural Fire Service, \$1 million per annum funding to the State Emergency Service and Volunteer Marine Rescue—a very important component of the budget.

This package will ensure the ongoing safety and wellbeing of all our volunteers through this provision of structured training and increased standards of operational and personal protective equipment and support. The Volunteer Support Package addresses some of the key issues arising from the Linton coronial inquiry in Victoria and its implications for Rural Fire Service and SES volunteers.

Since 1998-99, the Beattie government has allocated increased funding to Counter Disaster and Rescue Services totalling \$11.8 million, which is included in the 2002-03 budget, to support the key services to our volunteers, our disaster management and mitigation, and our emergency helicopter services throughout Queensland.

Another extremely important initiative is the Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package, which provides \$2.1 million over four years. This package builds upon the existing funding commitment by all emergency services to improve the delivery of emergency services to rural and remote indigenous communities. It seeks to achieve greater participation by those communities in the establishment of flexible models of service delivery in those communities, along with improved access to services. This is very much in tune, of course, with the Cape York Justice Study and we are very firmly a part of that.

This year's budget provides \$18.3 million to enable the Queensland Ambulance Service to maintain its focus on improving urgent and non-urgent service delivery. This is a priority area for the QAS, as recent statistics show a significant increase in ambulance service demand across code one and code two call-outs and the resultant impact on response times in a number of regions. Code one call-outs are for life-threatening emergencies, and code two are for semi-urgent but not life-threatening situations. Apparent increases in these call-outs are occurring in various parts of the state where there is strong population growth and, surprisingly, the 0 to 20 year age group appears to have the largest increases.

Figures for July 2001 to March 2002 across the state show code one call-outs increased by seven per cent and code twos skyrocketed by an alarming 22 per cent. I have written to the department's Director-General, Michael Kinnane, formally requesting an investigation into these increases, plus the formation of a comprehensive and coordinated strategy to deal with the issue.

This budget's funding will also help the QAS to not only provide appropriate levels of service but will also ensure that standards of service are maintained and improved. These standards will be improved through the development of national standard education programs for ambulance staff, pre-hospital care research with tertiary institution partners, improvements to vehicle design and operational audits to identify improvement opportunities.

Funding will also be allocated to supplement the shortfall in funding identified by the review of the QAS subscription scheme. This process is expected to be completed by November and, if successful, the government will enter into an agreement with one or a number of private health funds.

Also contained in the budget is \$15.6 million in additional funding in regard to our emergency helicopter services throughout the state. That includes replacement of the Queensland Rescue Squirrel helicopter at a cost of \$8 million over two years and increased allocations to community helicopter providers and our Queensland rescue helicopter service. This state budget will provide \$3.85 million in annual grants to the state's community helicopter providers, which will see

significant increases for each of those by about 35 per cent. The capital works component of the budget—

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for your opening contribution has expired. The first period of questions is allocated to non-government members.

**Mr MALONE:** I welcome the minister to the 2002 estimates and your staff and members of the department. I have to say that I feel quite intimidated by the amount of paperwork you have got over there! Let us hope I can make you use all of it. In the ministerial portfolio statement at page 26 a figure was given for the replacement of ambulances. Maybe you could describe what you mean by 'replacement'?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** What was that page, sorry?

**Mr MALONE:** Page 26. Perhaps you could describe what you mean by 'replacement' and indicate how many ambulances have actually been allocated this financial year and what is the total number of ambulances actually in the fleet currently?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I would be very happy to do that. Can I just say that I am aware that the member for Mirani and the opposition spokesman have spoken a number of times in regard to the need for an up-to-date, state-of-the-art fleet. I was out at Capalaba just last Saturday, at the ambulance station there, looking at one of the new ambulances out there. I tell you what: state-of-the-art is exactly what we are now getting in regard to those particular ambulances.

Can I say that in the last financial year, 2001-02, the QAS provided \$8.8 million for up to 136 new or refurbished vehicles. That, of course, was similar to the amount that we provided in the previous financial year as well. In terms of the actual vehicles that were obtained in that particular period of time, there were also some carry over ambulances that we had there. Perhaps I can just give you an idea of them. In 2001-02 we had 39 two-stretcher two-wheel drive emergency response vehicles, 61 one-stretcher two-wheel drive emergency response vehicles and 18 two-stretcher four-wheel drive emergency response vehicles. As you would be aware, those four-wheel drive vehicles are very, very apt in terms of some of the areas of the state with heavy terrain and they are very, very important in that regard. We also provided seven one-stretcher four-wheel drive emergency response vehicles, 12 patient non-urgent transport vehicles and three support service vehicles as well.

Could I indicate in regard to the total number of vehicles in the fleet, as at 31 May 2002, the QAS operates a fleet of 966 vehicles, of which 779 are operational vehicles and include ambulances and patient transport vehicles used to transport patients. It is important to say that as we review our ambulance fleet, we are doing that on a basis of absolutely ensuring that, indeed, we have the provincial areas, the metropolitan areas, the fringe metropolitan and rural and remote areas very, very well serviced by ambulance vehicles.

I might also add, in conclusion, that as a result of these purchases this year and over the last three years of the Beattie government, the estimated number of operational vehicles with economic life as at 31 May is 85 per cent. This figure is ahead of the MPS target, which was greater than 80 per cent.

**Mr MALONE:** So in terms of operational vehicles, excluding transport vehicles, you are probably looking at roughly 650 operational transport vehicles as code one and code two vehicles. In a question on notice on 9 May, question No. 445, you indicated that there were 534 Q-Fleet vehicles operational within the DES. It is pretty interesting to see those figures because it really indicates that almost one-for-one you have Q-Fleet vehicles as opposed to operational vehicles. I assume that is part of the package for your senior bureaucrats. I guess it would be true to say that most of the bureaucrats do not really respond to accidents or incidents. The question really is: are you aware or are you looking at the funding allocation between the operational and the administration sides of the DES, particularly within QAS?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say that it is important not to get confused. I think the figures you were talking about in the question on notice were possibly only—were they across the department or QAS only?

**Mr MALONE:** Across the department

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is across the department, so you are actually interpolating figures that relate to the QAS and then comparing that across the department. Can I say first of all that, in terms of that interpolation, the department actually consists of the Queensland Ambulance Service, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and also the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service. In regard to the department as a whole, let me give you an idea of the figures you are

quoting, but I do not think it is as easy to interpolate across the divisions as you are actually trying to do.

The Department of Emergency Services leases a fleet of 548 vehicles. That is pretty much what you were saying, I think. This is the latest figure. The lease vehicle fleet is used to enhance our response capabilities in addition to providing administrative support. Of the 548 vehicles, 378 are available for operational activities, including critical response and support. These vehicles are normally driven by qualified personnel and fitted with operational equipment and warning devices as well.

The department also leases 117 commercial vehicles that are used for the maintenance of facilities, delivery of training and community education and operational support activities. There are only 53 vehicles, that is 10 per cent of our fleet, leased by the two corporate divisions of the department—the Support Services Business Unit and the Strategic and Executive Services Division. Since 1 May 2002 the department has been implementing the whole-of-government policy on the use of government-owned motor vehicles. Car pooling has been established in the corporate services division of the Kedron Park facility. This initiative will be considered in regional areas as well. The size of the lease fleet has increased by 17 from the previous year, from 531 to 548. Each division of the department is currently reviewing the number of vehicles leased and the operational efficiency with an objective to rationalise the size of the fleet where possible. The better use of four-cylinder vehicles in non-operational activities will also be a priority. A decision to lease vehicles is based on economic feasibility and the need to provide adequate resources to meet response times. A decision to lease patient transport units for the Queensland Ambulance Service rather than to purchase them is an example of this evaluation process. In conclusion, we look very carefully at our fleet numbers across our department. In terms of the QAS, the use of the vehicles is carefully examined as well.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer to question No. 7 on notice, which indicated that the cost of outsourced legal advice amounted to \$571,000. I believe that an update has just come in the last few minutes in terms of the amount of money spent on legal advice external to the department. Could the minister give some indication of what more than \$500,000 in terms of legal advice was actually used for? I believe that almost \$500,000 in Crown Law advice was utilised by the department over the last 12 months. Could the minister also indicate what amount of money has been allocated this year for legal advice?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** First, if one looks at our Department of Emergency Services budget, it is a budget of the order of over \$550 million. When I scrutinise the amount of money that we actually spend on consultants for professional advice and for that outside advice to be given, I am sure the member would agree that it is a very small part of a \$550 million budget. My preference is always to ensure that with our existing staff, with the talents and the professionalism that they bring to their work, it is very important to ensure that we do much of our work in-house. In regard to the consultancies that we actually put out, some of those are in-house within the government as well. We always ensure, for example, that much of our legal advice comes from Crown Law. In the figures that we have given in terms of Crown Law costs, the expenditure for the period about which the member has asked was \$524,667. We then had a small number of other legal consultancies—Gilshenan & Luton Lawyers, \$2,038; Ken Watson, \$8,500; Maddock Lonie and Chisholm, \$2,023; Mallesons Stephen Jaques Solicitors, \$11,000; McInnes Wilson, \$10,244; Terrence Gardiner, \$800; and the Public Trustee of Queensland, \$12,132.

**Mr MALONE:** That is on record, minister. Can the minister give me some idea of what the legal advice was used for? That is really what the question was.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I would prefer to that take on notice and give those numbers. We have a fair number to go through. We will not get that done in the time allocated. I would be very happy to provide that advice to the member. I should stress again that our budget this year is over \$550 million. If we look at those figures I was quoting, we can see that much of the work is done by our own staff. Whether we look at engineering, technical, legal consultants or any of these areas, it is a very small portion of our budget.

**Mr MALONE:** The minister has not yet indicated how much money he has set aside for external legal advice for this coming year. Could the minister also indicate how many unfair dismissal cases his department dealt with over the past year? Does the department use Crown Law or external legal advice for those cases?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Again, sometimes in regard to external legal advice it is very much dependent on the month-by-month work that we are required to do. We work with a range of

different contractors. If we find that there is a particular concern with a contract, we may be asking for legal advice from Crown Law—

**Mr MALONE:** What is the approximate amount, though?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will be getting to the amount shortly. We would estimate an amount of about \$150,000 in the 2002-03 year. In regard to the area of unfair dismissals, over the last year there was one unfair dismissal case in the QAS and one in the QFRS. Both of those cases have been finalised. We are not aware of any in the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service. If there are any there, we will get back to the member. This shows that in terms of our staff who are working in the department, we have a pretty happy staff. Certainly, we work in a very traumatic area in accident and rescue, fire and ambulance, but those two cases represent a low number given our staffing.

**Mr MALONE:** A point of clarification—is the minister indicating that there is \$400,000 less in the budget this year than was actually spent last year in terms of legal advice?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is correct.

**Mr MALONE:** Question on notice No. 8 notes that in terms of casual, temporary, acting staff and vacancies there was a total 'floating' work force of 793 positions. Although the Premier has assured the Public Service of permanency of positions, is it fair to assume that most of those positions will be taken out of the line?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The answer is no. In regard to the Beattie government's employment policy, as the member would be aware, it is probably the strongest employment policy this government could have. Basically, it is about ensuring that there are no forced redundancies. Basically, it is about ensuring that the staff in our department, as in other government departments, will be treated fairly. In any work that we as a department will be doing in the next 12 months we will be strictly adhering to the Beattie government's policy on employment security. I say very sincerely today that our employees are valued. They are valued in the very important work that they do right across the department, whether they work in provincial, metropolitan or rural and remote areas. At the end of the day, in terms of any changes that we make in regard to our department, we will value our employees and certainly be sticking very strongly to the Beattie government's employment policy, which is one of security. That will be very much our standard in that regard.

**Mr MALONE:** Irrespective of the minister's answer, there are approximately 793 positions within his department that are temporary positions or acting positions. The minister's rhetoric today seems to be at odds with those current figures?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I think the member is very erroneously adding up all the figures we have provided in respect of question on notice No. 8. The member is erroneously adding and duplicating figures. The figure of about 700 has no relevance at all to the department. I would be quite happy to allow a departmental officer to explain it to the member later, but the figures being quoted back to us by the member—and I do not say this with any disrespect—just do not make any sense.

**Mr MALONE:** We might pursue that another time.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** We are happy for someone from the department to explain those figures.

**Mr MALONE:** In terms of consultancies, I note under question No. 7—and I stress that we only recently received an update on those figures—that the department spent \$5.6 million on consultancy and out-service advice in the past financial year. Those expenditures included such items as marking of exams and assignments, \$20,000 and some dollars; office accommodation; and a meeting with ministers. If I wanted to be really nasty I could carry on with quite a number more that do not make a lot of sense. When we talk to the people on the ground, those sorts of figures do not gel that well with them. Will the minister justify that expenditure? Would it not be better directed towards more operational-type requirements?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** First, as the member knows, I spend a great deal of my time out in the regions at a station level. I can always understand those at a station level who want to ensure that moneys spent locally and at the station level are their priority. As minister, it is also absolutely strictly my priority to ensure that the dollars go to service delivery. As I say, in a department with a budget of over \$550 million there is a requirement for some small amount of outsourcing. That is in the area where we do not have the skills and the employees themselves. I can ask the Director-General, Michael Kinnane, to elaborate in regard to the consultancy question the member has asked.

**Mr KINNANE:** As the minister has mentioned, the department engages external expert advice and services through consultancies, contractors and professional services. It is important for me to highlight, first, to the committee that there are in fact those three categories. When one refers to the broad term 'consultancies', it is important for me to emphasise that there are three categories—consultancies, contractors and professional services. I will not go into too much detail on definitions, only to say that a consultant is a person who provides expert advice and who generally is engaged for a fixed period of time at an agreed rate. The cost of the consultancies engaged by the department as of 30 June 2002 was \$1 million. I make the point that, when one looks at the breakdown of the figures, it is important to note that significant amounts are related to very important research of a direct relationship to operational service delivery and, in particular, to current research being carried out by Queensland on the cost of disaster mitigation. For example, one-quarter of that figure, no less than \$224,000, was funded for consultancy costs for a research project with the Bureau of Meteorology on climate change and community vulnerability to tropical cyclones. The other point worthwhile emphasising is that under the heading of 'Professional Services' a figure of no less than \$1 million was a payment for aeromedical services to the Royal Flying Doctor Service. There are many examples of the Department of Emergency Services' use of consultancies. Generally, the department seeks outside external expert advice. One can see that in fact these resources are used to very much supplement and augment the specialist experience we have within the Department of Emergency Services. May I assure the committee that in fact every cent is devoted to projects of a direct operational service delivery nature.

**The CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired. I now call the member for Charters Towers.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Page 1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements highlights the department's commitment to strengthening links with the community. As a member of my own local ambulance committee I know the important role they play in this regard, as well as supporting the Queensland Ambulance Service. Could you please outline some of their major achievements over the past 12 months?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I first of all congratulate the member for Charters Towers on the excellent work that she does in her electorate in regard to ambulance services. She has been a member of the QAS in a commissioner's reference group, now called the QAS Advisory Council. I know how dedicated she is in the work that she does in the Charters Towers electorate.

Local ambulance committees are an extraordinarily important element to QAS operations and active community engagement. They provide an essential partnership between the QAS operations and the community. They give feedback and support their local stations financially as well. I want to say that community interest in the QAS continues to be reflected in the maintenance of the number of committees. There are 175 local ambulance committees throughout Queensland. There were 176 but the Southport and Coral Gardens LACs amalgamated to form the Southport and District LAC. I note that recently when I was down at Coral Gardens the member for Burleigh was with us as well. There are some great ambulance services on the Gold Coast. They are very, very good and we are augmenting that all the time with extra staff. Eleven additional communities have applied to become LACs. That will happen in the next 12 months. It is really showing that the partnership we have out there with our local communities is excellent. It really does show that that we have a significant amount of community interest. That is very much appreciated by our ambulance paramedics and officers in charge. It signifies the strength and the value that Queenslanders have for our ambulance service.

An estimated \$1.48 million was provided by LACs over the last two financial years. That is a valuable contribution indeed by the community. The new LAC constitution received ministerial approval on 8 April 2002, which will take effect when adopted by each local ambulance committee at the next meeting of each committee. Many LACs have also been successful in obtaining grants from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. I know that the member for Charters Towers and her members of the local committee quite often travel long distances. The distance the member travels in her electorate to get to LAC meetings and to visit ambulance stations really exemplifies why local members have that important role to play in our rural and remote areas. I visited some of those stations in the central Queensland area just recently with the member for Charters Towers. I mention Capella as an example. There is a marvellous ambulance facility there and they have expansion plans as well. It is great to see that active involvement of LACs.



**Mrs SMITH:** On page 16 of the MPS there is reference to counter disaster and rescue services. Dot point 3 refers to the purchase of flood rescue boats. It was a Beattie government initiative to fund the upgrade of the ageing flood boat fleet. Can you inform the committee of what was achieved with this initiative?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes. I do this with a great deal of pleasure because I know that I was a new member of the Beattie government in June 1998, as was the chairman. At that time I was astounded to find the neglect of the last few years under the coalition where we saw very little achievement in regard to flood boat replacement. So at the outset of the Beattie government we announced an initiative in funding of \$1.5 million over four years for replacement of non-compliant and aged flood boats. As I say, it was a disgraceful situation where the department was not able through the budgetary process to deliver the sort of dollars that were required to be delivered. Since the start of that flood boat replacement program in 1998-99 all 193 boats located throughout the state now comply as commercial vessels under the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Regulations 1995. Additionally, the replacement program has achieved a reduction in the average age of vessels from 13 years to 11 years. A total of 73 flood boats have been replaced since the start of that program. That is a significant program because over one-third of the fleet has been replaced.

If members look at the figures they can see how we brought that average age down. Since 1988-99, 20 boats that were 20 years old or more have been replaced; 35 boats that were 10 years old or more have been replaced; 12 that were under 10 years of age have been replaced; and six new boats have been allocated to areas of Queensland that previously did not have that resource. In 2001-02, funding of \$600,000, including \$250,000 in special initiative funding, was provided for the continuation in our replacement of aged flood boats and outboard motors. Last financial year a total of 17 new flood boats, 9 new outboard motors and safety equipment were purchased and distributed to higher priority SES groups. When you look at the distribution, those flood boats have had a major impact right across Queensland—in Mareeba, St Lawrence, Hughenden, Caboolture, Charleville, Innisfail, Ingham, Eulo, Thargomindah, Boulia, Proserpine, Ipswich, Goodna, Cairns, Bundaberg, Texas and Stanthorpe. The outboard motors that we have delivered have a similar distribution across the state. Even though the program has expired, funding of \$117,500 will be provided in 2002-03 to enable the replacement of up to five aged flood boats in higher priority areas. This signifies the Beattie government's commitment to increase the effectiveness of our State Emergency Services. We put a very, very high priority on it.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I refer you to page 39 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Under the heading 'Recent Achievements' dot points 2 and 3 refer to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Whyte Island training academy. I understand that the QFRS Whyte Island training facility is one of the best in the world. Could you please inform the committee about some of the state-of-the-art features of this academy?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Redlands for asking the question. I am very proud of what the Queensland Fire and Rescue academy has provided to the people of Queensland. I say 'the people of Queensland' because every recruit that goes through that academy is of course then posted to any part of Queensland, including the Redlands district. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service academy at the port of Brisbane commenced limited operations in about September 2002. It is regarded as one of the most advanced of its kind in the world. In fact, since then the academy has been increasing its operation commensurate with the demand for the use of the facility as various training simulations amenities have been completed. The academy has been nominated for awards in the areas of construction and project management. I say as minister, and I know I say it on behalf of the commissioner and other staff at QFRS, that we are rightly very proud of this facility.

The academy is built on two sites totalling 7.8 hectares of land. The main campus incorporates a purpose-built education centre, vertical rescue and confined space training facility, and streetscape and buildings for practical training in firefighting and rescue. The second site, the live fire campus—which has to be seen to be believed; it is an incredible live firefighting exercise—is used by the QFRS and other organisations for practical firefighter training. Let me give members of the committee an idea of the accomplishments and our recognition across other parts of the southern hemisphere. The live fire campus has been in operation since April 2001. A number of courses have already been conducted by QFRS, external fire services and commercial clients as well. These include firefighters from New Zealand and Papua New Guinea as well as

large companies such as Caltex, Shell, BP, Santos and Woodside Petroleum, which have all chosen to train at this state-of-the-art, world-class facility.

One of the things that really makes me proud of what we offer as a service is when I am with the commissioner down at the academy for the graduation of our recruits. One of the graduation ceremonies took place just a couple of weeks ago. What one sees are some very proud recruits coming out of that academy who are very pleased with the level of education and practical work that they have been able to do. It is a great delight each time I go to one of those areas. \$1.35 million was expended last financial year. \$200,000 has been budgeted for 2002-03. We are very proud of the academy. It is being used as the base for the expansion of the QFRS's professional development. I am inspired by the staff through the development of new training courses and career development programs. We would like the members of the committee to come out and see it if they can.

**The CHAIR:** I take you to page 19 of the MPS. Under the heading 'Recent Achievements' there is a reference to community helicopter providers. The community helicopter providers provide an essential service to Queensland. Could you outline to the committee what arrangements are in place to support these community helicopter services?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Last week I made a visit to the rural fire service in your electorate of Ferny Grove. When one looks at that terrain and when one looks Mount Glorious and other areas, one realises that community helicopter providers become very useful. That was mentioned to me on my visit as well.

As minister I am very proud of the 2002-03 budget announcement and the significant 35 per cent increase to \$852,000 per annum for each of our community helicopter providers. I emphasise that this is a 35 per cent increase to worthy operators who provide this lifesaving support to our communities. This valuable partnership with community helicopter providers has been duly recognised by the Beattie government in honouring the government's commitment to safer and more supportive communities. The community helicopter providers all perform a multifunctional role, including aeromedical operations, search and rescue, counter disaster operations, support for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and support, of course, for the Queensland Police Service.

During the budget estimates committee hearing of the Emergency Services portfolio last year, the opposition spokesman for Emergency Services, Ted Malone, who is with us today, sought clarification as to whether the new service agreements with community helicopter providers would provide for them to do their own safety audits or whether the government would do the audits. Mr Malone also asked who would pay for the audits. The state of Queensland, through the Department of Emergency Services, has had service agreements with the four helicopter providers effective since 1996. These service agreements incorporate the minimum operating and safety standards, financial and activity reporting requirements and an agreement to operate with a coordinated system of aeromedical tasking of aircraft by the Queensland Ambulance Service and clinical coordination by Queensland Health. The department prepared these new five-year agreements in consultation with the community helicopter providers. Those new service agreements are effective from 1 February this year.

With regard to aviation safety, Commonwealth legislation of course plays the major role but I am pleased to say that the work we are doing with the helicopter providers is basically showing that the department includes the following safety provision: a requirement that all operations are conducted in accordance with Civil Aviation Safety Authority requirements and an appropriate air operator's certificate. In addition, these new service agreements contain requirements for comprehensive audit processes. Many of those helicopter providers have achieved this. For example the Mackay provider completed its audits in April-May this year. That audit meets the aviation safety audit provisions in the service agreement in a similar way to services provided in Capricorn, on the Sunshine Coast and in Bundaberg.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** On page 4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements there is a reference to the allocation of \$2.1 million in funding over four years for an indigenous service delivery enhancement package. Given that the Beattie government is committed to achieving safer and more supportive communities, how does the package support this important commitment?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The Department of Emergency Services plays a leading role across the Queensland government in regard to enhancing services to indigenous communities, and that is part of our 2001-05 strategic plan for indigenous Australians. This plan articulates four key goals:

community safety and prevention capability; innovation in service delivery; developing and supporting people; and integrating emergency management in strategic policy. I announced the policy that you have asked me about as part of our budget. The Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package, worth \$2.1 million over four years, is there to achieve greater ownership by rural and remote indigenous Australian communities in terms of the partnership that we wish to forge with them. I was up in the Torres Strait and Cape York about four or five weeks ago. We are forming tremendous partnerships with places such as the St Pauls community and Horn Island. Under this enhancement package we will see on the ground some marvellous partnerships between our indigenous DOGIT communities and the Queensland government. The package highlights the department's commitment. It includes things like the employment of ambulance field officers at Kowanyama and Horn Island. Field officers will work closely with Queensland Health clinical services. It includes training an additional five indigenous QAS patient transport officers in Beenleigh and Brisbane, a rural fire service training officer to support Cape York and Torres Strait Islander communities, employment of an SES VMR training officer to support communities in the cape and Torres Strait islands, the establishment of an indigenous projects officer to enhance coordinated community safety and prevention capability on Palm Island, the introduction of a joint rural fire service-SES train the trainer program for Cape York and Torres Strait volunteers, and the continuation of mandatory targets for intakes of indigenous student ambulance officers, trainees and firefighter recruits. We are very proud of what we have been able to do in bringing indigenous people into the fire service and the Ambulance Service. There are many other initiatives.

The initiatives I have been discussing today are very much contributing to safer and more supportive indigenous communities as well as contributing to meeting challenges and making choices as part of the Queensland government's response to the Cape York Justice Study and ongoing commitment to the indigenous people of Cape York. This is very much part of our strategic plan. It is embodying service delivery. In addition, it is embodying greater employment of indigenous people across the department, and that is working very, very well.

**Mrs SMITH:** Reference is made to aeromedical services on page 19 of the MPS. The Wide Bay-Burnett region was in need of enhanced paramedical, search and rescue and counter-disaster operations. What has the government done in response to these needs?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** We provide fixed-wing and rotary-wing aeromedical services to carry out emergency transport of seriously sick and injured patients when aerial transport is required. Following extensive negotiation, operation of the aerial service in Bundaberg was transferred to the Royal Flying Doctor Service in March this year. That was a red-letter day for Bundaberg. That announcement was warmly welcomed by the people of Bundaberg, Burnett and the Wide Bay area generally.

This agreement provides a more efficient and effective new King Air aircraft in Bundaberg. As part of the agreement, RFDS will operate the Cessna 404 Titan owned by QAS as a back-up aircraft to the King Air aircraft. The contractual arrangements have been developed on a three-year basis, with two three-year renewal options, providing stability and security for the Queensland community and the continuation of high-quality aeromedical services.

The Bundaberg QAS communication centre will continue to provide tasking and coordination for the aircraft based at Bundaberg in conjunction with the aeromedical desk at AFCOM as well. When you are at a communications centre, whether it is AFCOM or one of our QAS communications centres, it is great to see one of those communication officers—I am sure the Commissioner of Ambulance has seen this more than I have—being able to track down not only the ambulance that is required but quite often also making direct contact with either our Queensland rescue helicopters or our RFDS. It is part of the essential aeromedical service that we provide right across Queensland.

Four pilots and four flight nurses have been employed by the RFDS. They are housed at the newly improved base at Bundaberg. This is very much a cooperative arrangement between the QAS and the RFDS for the benefit of the community at large. I had a great deal of pleasure in launching that partnership in Bundaberg with my two parliamentary colleagues the member for Bundaberg, Nita Cunningham, and the member for Burnett, Trevor Strong. I know how proud they feel of that new service. In addition to the RFDS partnership, we now have a permanent Bell LongRanger helicopter based in Bundaberg providing an extended service to the Wide Bay-Burnett region. That really means that we have helicopter bases located at the Gold Coast, Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, Bundaberg, Rockhampton, Mackay, Townsville, Cairns and Horn

Island. Helicopters are one of the response platforms used in emergency medical services operations in Queensland.

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

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I direct your attention to page 28 of the MPS and the response benchmark of 10 minutes, which the MPS indicate you have consistently been unable to achieve. It is currently at 67.7 per cent. Minister, in a very bipartisan way, and certainly with full respect to the great work our paramedics do in the field, I think we would both have to say that a response time of 17 minutes in 90 per cent of cases is far too long, particularly for accidents where paramedics are required very quickly. Do you have any strategic or long-term plans for reducing that figure to something thought reasonable by the people of Queensland?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I welcome the bipartisan nature of the question. I included this as part of my opening remarks today. The government recognises that ambulance response times are a key performance indicator for the Queensland Ambulance Service. The demand for QAS services is increasing dramatically as the Queensland population grows and ages. The annual increase in population of approximately 65,000 people combined with the impact of an ageing population has resulted in increased demand for QAS code 1—life-threatening emergency—responses. This increase has been at six per cent per annum over the last few years and is now at seven per cent, rising from 144,123 in 1999-2000 to 150,871 in 2000-01. Additionally, the other element of the QAS emergency responses, which is code 2—pain and suffering—has increased by an extraordinary figure, at 22.7 per cent. That is the actual responses we have had. This strong increase in code 2 call-outs impacts upon the availability of responses to code 1s. The percentage of code 1 cases responded to in less than 10 minutes in 2001-02 was 67.7 per cent. That is about the target figure. The target figure was greater than 68 per cent. The number of cases attended to within the 10-minute time frame has increased in 2001-02. I could flag with the committee today a number of reasons we feel that may be the case. It is unclear just what specific factors are driving this increase. However, an early assessment indicates that similar trends are occurring in other states. Increases appear to follow the growth areas of Queensland. Calls to the elderly are not impacting as much as calls to the zero to 20 age group. We were quite surprised when we found that out. The impact of the Howard government's preference for all Australians to have private health cover may be having an impact as well.

I am concerned about this trend and I have requested the director-general and the Ambulance Commissioner to prepare a comprehensive report which looks at the factors influencing this trend and identifies what measures can be taken should the trend continue. In the meantime, the QAS is working through every possible strategy to assist in maximising speedy responses. We have a number of strategies in place. Could I have an extension, Mr Chairman? This is an important area.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, a short extension.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Let us go through some of the strategies. The QAS now uses work force modelling to study demand patterns for ambulance services and resource allocation to meet demand. Through this program, rosters are continually being reviewed to ensure optimal availability of staff to match peak workload periods. Communication centre technologies have been upgraded to ensure the nearest and most appropriate ambulance is dispatched to an incident. All newly appointed communication officers are completing the Certificate IV (Communications Officer) course, and current employees are working towards obtaining this qualification. The QAS intends to upgrade the Advanced Medical Priority Dispatch System software to version 11 later this year, which will continue to provide consistent and medically approved advice and processes in every communication centre.

We will also continue to monitor issues that have the potential to affect response time performances across all areas of service delivery. While I acknowledge the management strategies put in place by the QAS, I have tasked the department to ensure that every effort is being taken at all levels to optimise response times with current resources.

We need to be aware also that in Queensland we see a very different pattern from the other states. For example, the distance travelled by our vehicles—with 150,000 code 1 responses—in Queensland totalled 4.67 million kilometres, whereas in Victoria 272,000 responses totalled 3.42 million kilometres. It is obvious that we are the most decentralised state, occupying 22 per cent of the land mass but having only about 18 per cent of the population. I assure the shadow minister that that review is being undertaken at this time and I am very keen to run to ground some of those concerns.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, you show a great deal of concern about the level of resources as against the growth in demand in our state. I think you need to look at where the growth areas are. Certainly, the issue at Southport, which has been raised recently in the media, needs to be looked at. I know you would be disappointed if I did not raise the subscription scheme. I refer to page 32 of the MPS, which discusses the income generated by the Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme—\$80 million—which is right up there with the pedestrian bridge in terms of miscalculation. Certainly, you would be well aware of the fact that I have raised for a considerable time, right from the inception of the free ambulance scheme, the issue that there would be some concerns about funding this scheme. I have no issue with the intent of the scheme but certainly with the way it was funded. What plans do you have in place to ensure that the subscription scheme can continue and what funding will you allocate to it?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will reiterate the comments that both the Premier and I have made in regard to the work that we are focusing on. As you would be aware, the subscription scheme this financial year will suffer a \$14 million shortfall. That will rise to almost \$23 million by 2004-05. One could really say that over about a six-year period that loss to the subscription scheme, if our numbers reduce and go to private health funds in the way that they are now, could be over \$100 million. What I want to say today quite clearly and unequivocally is that our marketing and customer service staff do a spectacular job in promoting and marketing our Queensland Ambulance Service. One of the major concerns, I feel, is the 30 per cent rebate that has been offered by the Howard government, which gives the edge to the private health insurers. Basically, I believe that is inequitable in terms of the erosion of our public subscription scheme and in terms of the benefit to the private health funds.

The figures speak for themselves. There are now 6,000 fewer people in our subscription scheme than there were two years ago. They are going to the private health insurers. In terms of the people in the subscription scheme, 47 per cent of those have private health insurance as well. We are putting out a tender. The final decision on this has not been made and will not be made until about November. I am very concerned that we make the right decision on behalf of everyone who uses ambulance services in Queensland. But let me put to rest one mythology that is out there. In terms of the estimate for providing the pensioner policy, when we were in opposition that was thought to be about \$20 million. We made that estimate when we were in opposition. When we became the government—and I say this in a factual way—we found that the Ambulance Service was not able to produce the costs in a way so that we could actually track down the pensioner rebate. When we did that over that four-year period we found out that it was \$100 million. Let me just say that that \$100 million is not in any way, shape or form affecting our ambulance subscription scheme. That \$100 million is coming from Treasury to pay for the ambulance scheme for pensioners and Seniors Card holders. Unlike the opposition, we will keep this scheme. We are committed to free ambulance services for Seniors Card holders.

**Mr MALONE:** We will keep it, too.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I was surprised by your comments, Mr Malone, recently where you indicated that that was really a scheme that we should not be continuing. So I would not have the same policy as you.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I find some discrepancy when I go to page 31 of the MPS. It indicates that 65 per cent of Queenslanders are now covered by the QAS subscription scheme and it also indicates that there are 900,000 more subscribers in the scheme than what the target was last year. These are figures quoted out of the MPS. In reflecting on what you have just indicated to the committee in terms of a loss of subscription funds to QAS, I have some trouble reconciling what you are saying in terms of the healthiness of the scheme in relation to the number of people who are currently covered by QAS subscription and the fact that you are indicating that there has been a huge loss due to private providers. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes, I would. The figures are quite clear, but there are 640,000 prime subscribers who make up the Queensland ambulance subscription scheme. They cover families. They cover couples and a range of different categorisations. Those 640,000 prime subscribers make up about 1.5 million Queenslanders who are covered by the ambulance subscription scheme. Over and above that, there are about 950,000 pensioners and Seniors Card holders and their dependents who are covered for free. If you add those two figures together—that is, 1.5 million and about 950,000—you come to about 2.5 million Queenslanders who will be able to get an ambulance for any categorisation of incident for free or for no charge, if I can put it that way.

You have got your 640,000 prime subscribers—for example, the Malone family in the Sarina district. You are a subscriber, or I hope you are anyway.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** You are a subscriber and your spouse and any dependent child would be covered as well. So the 640,000 subscribers makes up about 1.5 million people who are either covered through the scheme or through our very good policy for seniors and pensioners and their dependents. We have got about 950,000 of those, so that comes out to about 2.5 million or 2.4 million. So you can see that our estimated actual this year is about 2.44 million and our target will be greater than that 2.44 million this coming financial year.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Minister. I would like to have the time to pursue the issue at more length, but time indicates that I have to move on. I refer to dot point 6 on page 26 of the MPS which refers to an audit process of QAS. Specifically, how often are independent and random audits of drug stocks conducted in every ambulance station in Queensland and how are these audits conducted? Can you indicate if there has been a discrepancy between the indicated amount of drugs and the audited figure?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is an operational question that I will pass on to the Commissioner for the QAS, Dr Gerry FitzGerald.

**Dr FITZGERALD:** Thanks, Minister. I am not aware that we undertake independent audits of stocks. All of our controlled substances or controlled drugs, of course, are controlled in accordance with the poisons regulations and, as a result, are subject to appropriate recording mechanisms in drug books, et cetera. That in itself, I suppose, is the control device in that those books are examined from time to time by the Health Department. I am not sure that I can give you how often or when they are examined.

With regard to your question about the number of discrepancies, they are very few and far between. They are usually brought to my attention and, from my recollection, that would be two or three times a year at most. Most of them, of course, are where something has got lost in the process, but very occasionally there have been episodes of unfortunate misuse.

**Mr MALONE:** So there is no departmental overview of the audit process? It is done station by station?

**Dr FITZGERALD:** It is generally done at the station level, yes.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, in the MPS of last year under the 'Capital acquisitions' section of the QFRS there was an allocation of money for the strategic land purchase at Balmoral. However, in light of your recent comments about Balmoral and the fact that it will be closed, it seems that no replacement will be built. I have not seen an explanation of where the allocation of funding went from last year's budget and it has not been reconciled in this current budget paper. Could you indicate what actually happened to the money? Did the money actually go back to corporate services, or was it expended in another way?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** First of all, with regard to the Balmoral Fire Station, I have advised the parliament about this on a number of occasions, but let me just reiterate some of the comments that I have made. Balmoral is Brisbane's oldest remaining fire station; it was built in 1927. Other stations built in the 1920s like Balmoral have long since been closed. The Balmoral Fire Station is currently situated within the response area of the Camp Hill Fire Station. Additionally, heritage listing and workplace health and safety requirements have contributed to the decision that the station should eventually close. This station can no longer, I believe, provide the facilities required by a fire service of the 21st century.

The planned closure is part of the constant review of service delivery that we have undertaken over the last 18 months of the QFRS across Queensland. A date for the closure has not been established. However, it should be noted that QFRS has and will continue to carry out thorough community consultation on this matter. Any options will be carefully considered before a final decision regarding the eventual closure of the station and the future service delivery provision for the Balmoral area is made. As part of that consultation, the QFRS has joined with the department's community engagement unit in developing an operational plan if the closure does go ahead. We have already had a number of discussions with key local businesses. A presentation has been made to the mutual aid group at the Port of Brisbane Corporation explaining the rationale behind the closure and the extent of the changes to operational responses to Lytton, White Island and Fisherman Island locations.

It is important to say that all staff in the Brisbane South Region have been provided with information sessions regarding the eventual closure with the assurance that no staff will lose their jobs. Positions, not people, will be relocated to other parts of Queensland. In many ways, this is in relation to the finalisation of the one plus three crewing issue. With regard to last year's MPS where you have indicated that an allocation was made to look at the purchase of land in that area of the Balmoral Fire Station, I can reassure you today that that money continues to stay in our capital component of our budget for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. That goes into the sort of capital purchases that we are undertaking this year, not only across the Brisbane region but of course across the length and breadth of Queensland as well. That is an important part of our budget and will continue to be over the next number of years.

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

**Mr ENGLISH:** Minister, in a previous question you did touch on the vehicle life cycle. I refer you again to page 28, which highlights the proportion of the QAS fleet within economic life. I know that currently the QAS has exceeded its target of 80 per cent. Can you outline the vehicle build program for 2001-02 and what is proposed for the 2002-03 year?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Redlands for that question. When the Beattie government came into office in 1998-99, in the first budget we brought down within months of coming into office funding for the Queensland Ambulance Service was \$177,330,000. In a four-year period we have increased that from \$177.3 million to \$253.7 million. Over that time we have had an incredible increase in ambulance paramedics and new QAS stations. As you correctly say, Mr English, the ageing of our fleet has been a very important component of the work we do as well.

The QAS as at 31 May 2002 operates a fleet of 966 vehicles and includes ambulances and patient transport vehicles used to transport patients. We are modernising the fleet to ensure that the mix is appropriate to service the delivery needs of our patients. We are a very important part of the health continuum. I think sometimes that is forgotten in a general perspective, but we are part of the pre-hospital health continuum. It is important to say that what we do on the ground is vitally important in terms of the survival and the future treatment of people in hospital—that is, with a cardiac arrest our response times and the state-of-the-art vehicles we have are vital for the health continuum.

We have been standardising and modernising the design of all vehicles through the QAS statewide Vehicle and Equipment Committee. Major advances in fleet modernisation and procurement include the fact that the Ford F series cab chassis is now purchased through Ford Australia as a right-hand drive vehicle and the warranty cover has increased from two years and 50,000 kilometres to three years and 100,000 kilometres. You would be pleased to know that this has eliminated the need to convert vehicles to right-hand drive. It is a pity that Mr Malone is not here, because a number of questions were asked last year about the conversion of those vehicles and some concerns we had at that particular time.

Ford F 350 vehicles now have full weight capacity to match QAS needs without requiring gross vehicle mass upgrade. The move to Mercedes Sprinter vans has had significant benefits and savings on purchase cost, warranty, maintenance and running costs. The availability of the four-wheel drive Mercedes Sprinter van has removed the need to build modules which have weight limitations as well. As you can see, this department is committed to supplying our ambos with modern and reliable vehicles that the Queensland community rightly deserves and rightly expects.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, page 3 of the MPS sets out some budget highlights for the department. The volunteer support package is indicated as a highlight. Could you please outline to the committee some of the significant deliverables for our volunteers?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is quite appropriate that the member for Ferny Grove would ask me this question—if I could say that first of all—because last Saturday I had the delight of being able to visit one of your local rural fire brigades in the Samford Valley. As I said then, you should be extraordinarily proud of that rural fire brigade. It is recognised by the Rural Fire Service as being the best operational brigade in Queensland.

**The CHAIR:** I should let them know.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** You should let them know that and reiterate that, as well. The volunteer support package I announced with this year's budget provides \$18.9 million over four years as part of the government's commitment to the ongoing support of the vital role that volunteers undertake in delivering emergency and counter-disaster services. This package will ensure the

ongoing safety and wellbeing of our volunteers through the provision of structured training and increased standards of operational and personal protective equipment and support. This will enhance the capability of all our emergency services volunteers—the 85,000 of them—to ensure their ongoing viability and safety.

Last year, on becoming the minister, I became aware of the Linton coronial inquiry which was to take place in Victoria and I was shocked to hear that five rural firefighters lost their lives in Victoria just a small number of years ago. It really hits you very, very clearly when you find that one of those rural firefighters who lost his life was about 18 years old, worked in a bank and had no training to go out on a major rural fire exercise. That is the sadness of the fact that we need to absolutely make sure. We have a duty of care, and that duty of care needs to be exercised by a comprehensive volunteer support package as has been introduced this year.

We have a comprehensive set of training and infrastructure initiatives which will be implemented to provide enhanced support to Rural Fire Service volunteers. We will see five additional district training officers and one training resource officer to provide training and support. We will be seeing enhanced delivery of distance training to our 45,000 rural fire volunteers, upgraded essential personal protective equipment, upgraded communications equipment infrastructure, including the radio networks for rural fire operations, and enhanced fleet modernisation programs. They are the improvements in the rural fire area. In much the same area we will see a \$1 million enhancement package for SES that we commenced last year. We will see that again being provided to provide a comprehensive set of safety, protective equipment and support initiatives which will be implemented across the SES. This is the cornerstone, I believe, of a great drive to help our volunteers.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** The MPS at page 12 refers to chemical, biological and radiological incidents. Both 11 September and hosting CHOGM earlier this year identified the need for response plans to chemical, biological and radiological incidents to be in place. Could you inform the committee how the DES has contributed to an effective whole-of-government response?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much for that very important question. As we get nearer to the anniversary of 11 September it is still very much a question on all our minds. I am very pleased to say that my department has contributed to the development of a strategic level decision-making framework that supports the Queensland disaster management system in preparation, response and recovery from a chemical, biological or radiological what we call CBR or related terrorist incident. Historically, state level management of a deliberate, that is, terrorist related CBR release would involve two structures: crisis management arrangements under the National Anti Terrorist Plan to resolve a terrorist incident or other significant act of politically motivated violence and, secondly, consequence management arrangements under the State Counter Disaster Plan for resolving the effects of a CBR or other major incidents on communities.

The department has representation at the State Crisis Centre, which deals with the crisis management aspects of a terrorist incident. This representation will ensure effective integration of crisis and consequence management arrangements. A major incidents group has been established to provide for ministerial involvement in the consequence management of natural disasters, CBR incidents or other extreme events.

The technological, logistical and social response to such events does require—and would require—rapid coordination at all levels of government. If activated, the major incidents group will provide high-level decision making and leadership to the response and recovery operations associated with extreme events. It would also provide appropriate state resources to expedite the response and recovery operations. It would be there to determine the state government public information and media strategy. That is very important, even in terms of disasters such as cyclones and flooding. It is also there to liaise with the State Crisis Centre as required to ensure effective integration of crisis and consequence management strategies.

In the lead-up to hosting CHOGM 2002 Queensland agencies further developed operational protocols to establish a closer link between the National Anti Terrorist Plan and Queensland disaster management arrangements. Arrangements were also put in place to ensure an effective whole-of-government response to the community consequence issues associated with a CBR incident through the existing disaster management structure.

My department is also represented on the national CBR working group chaired by Emergency Management Australia. It is through this forum that Queensland and the other jurisdictions ensure a coordinated approach to the development of a national capability. I can



assure the committee that Queenslanders can also be assured that this government is diligent in its planning and preparedness if this type of event occurs.

**Mrs SMITH:** Dot point 7 on page 39 refers to QFRS communications. On the fire scene communication is vital to the safety of firefighters. What is the department doing to ensure that our firefighters have the latest in hands-free communication technology?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is committed to providing a safe working environment and achieving best practices in firefighting techniques. The Beattie Labor government provided the QFRS with initiative funding of \$2.4 million for improvements to personal firefighter safety of which \$400,000 was allocated for the introduction of hands-free communications technology. These funds have been fully expended. Additionally, the QFRS has expended a further \$307,000 during 2001-02 for the purchase of hands-free equipment. Hands-free equipment consists of headsets, push-to-talk smart boxes, cables and adaptors. Trials of the equipment have taken place and feedback received from firefighters is being used to improve the communication systems themselves.

The greatest issue to operational staff is user comfort. The QFRS has found that firefighters prefer units which fit into their breathing apparatus and that the past fit had some level of discomfort. A change to the helmet appears to have satisfactorily addressed that issue. The QFRS technical service is currently working with the suppliers and firefighters to improve user acceptance of the hands-free communication units. It is also working on a variety of hands-free applications.

It is important to note that the QFRS is advancing its professional standing amongst fire authorities within Australia with this technology and is continuing its investigations and research into improved technology that will further enhance our commitment to firefighter safety. Research on market and technology developments is also being examined to ensure that firefighters have the best equipment available. I announced an additional \$500,000 in this year's budget for the continuing purchase of equipment. It is estimated that a further amount of some \$80,000 or \$100,000 will be required in the next financial year to complete the issue of this equipment.

I conclude by saying that my admiration goes to our Queensland firefighters—urban, auxiliary and rural—who commit their all in providing us with a safer and more supportive community.

**The CHAIR:** The committee will now adjourn for a short break.

Sitting suspended from 2.25 p.m. to 2.37 p.m.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Page 1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements indicates that enhancing community safety and prevention capability is a key strategic area for the Department of Emergency Services. The Spicers Falls tragedy highlighted the need to enhance community safety in our national parks. It is essential for police and emergency services to be able to quickly locate people lost or injured in our national parks. How is your department involved in addressing this vital need?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Redlands for the question because it relates to many areas of his electorate—certainly the islands he represents in the Moreton Bay area. This is an area the shadow spokesman has had an active interest in over a period of time. To progress the issue of possible personal locator beacons, or PLBs, in national parks a working group was established. The working group exists of officers from the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service, the Queensland Police Service and the Department of Emergency Services itself. As the issues surrounding the use of PLBs in national parks and forestry areas are complex, input from other agencies was sought, for example AusSAR, Australian Search and Rescue, which is responsible for detecting the activation of EPIRBs and PLBs in Australia.

The working party has met and identified two elements to trial. The first is the need for physical evaluation of the effectiveness of PLBs in rugged areas in Lamington National Park and the Scenic Rim, where most of the state's lost hiker incidents occur. The second is the need to trial the hiring of PLBs from selected outlets in Lamington National Park for a 12-month period. A full evaluation of the effectiveness of the hiring program following the trial period will determine future arrangements for the rest of the state.

The physical trial of the beacons was conducted from 18 to 21 February this year in various popular hiking areas in Lamington National Park, Green Mountains and at Spicers Gap. Representatives of the Queensland Police Service, DES, Parks and Wildlife, AusSAR and local bushwalking clubs participated in the trial. Results of the physical trial were taken into account when producing documents, the second element of the trial. The second element of the trial did

commence. We have purchased 10 of the 406MHz fast-find PLBs for the 12-month hire period. Binna Burra and O'Reilly's mountain resorts have in principle agreed to be the two hire points for the 12-month period. Queensland Parks and Wildlife officers are currently arranging hire arrangements with the operators of those resorts.

On 28 May Minister McGrady and I jointly launched that trial. The working group will be monitoring the progress of the trial during the 12-month period. Factors such as the frequency of hiring and input from hirers—bushwalkers—will be taken into account in the final report to government. Those PLBs that can be hired from Binna Burra Mountain Resort in Lamington National Park for \$20 per week. Negotiations are continuing to ensure that O'Reilly's resort can be put in that situation as well. This is a great advancement from what was in place when that young bushwalker was killed.

**The CHAIR:** Page 28 highlights survival rates for out-of-hospital cardiac arrests. This is a key benchmark of ambulance services nationally and internationally. Would you please inform the committee how Queensland rates?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much for that very important question. When I first became Minister for Emergency Services and was told of the out-of-hospital cardiac arrest survival rate, I was shocked. The figure probably shocks most people when they hear it for the first time. A cardiac arrest occurs when the heart stops suddenly, resulting in loss of consciousness and likely resultant death. A principal performance measure for ambulance services is the survival of patients who have suffered a cardiac arrest outside of hospital. When this was first measured in Queensland 15 years ago, only one per cent of cardiac arrest patients could be revived—one person in 100.

It has been demonstrated that the availability of portable defibrillators and cardiopulmonary resuscitation, CPR, will enable more of these patients to be revived. Together with the Australian Resuscitation Council, QAS conducts the CPR 2000 program to teach CPR to more Queenslanders. With the assistance of our local ambulance committees, QAS has also undertaken a major program to place defibrillators in all first response ambulances and to train staff in their use. In addition, QAS has introduced intensive care paramedics authorised to administer additional lifesaving measures through that special drug protocol they have.

Initial Queensland Health data indicates a survival rate from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest of 5.5 per cent to six per cent, representing people who leave hospital alive. This data does not give the actual result for QAS where the immediate effect of CPR is best seen in terms of immediate patient survivability. Their responsibility for the patient ends at the point of handover to the hospital. Initial QAS research data and a comparison of data from 1996 and 1999 indicates an increase in the survival rate from out-of-hospital cardiac arrest from 11.5 per cent to 15.1 per cent—that is, patients with a pulse on arrival at hospital. That is an increase from 93 to 208 people.

QAS data suggests that significant benefits have been derived from the investments that have been made by the Beattie government in the modernisation and upgrading of our ambulance services in Queensland—the upgrading of our vehicles, our equipment and our staff training. It does really show that if we are to maintain what I believe is the mantle we have—being the best ambulance service in Australia—we need to ensure that we plough the necessary funding into ambulance services to ensure state-of-the-art vehicles, state-of-the-art medical equipment, the number of paramedics we need and the provision of specialist courses for our intensive care paramedics. That provides this better data and I hope that will continue into the years to come.

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

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I take you back to the issue of subscriptions. By your admission, soon after gaining government in 1998 previous ministers became aware that the system was unsustainable or was losing money to a great extent. As the subscription system is an integral part of the Ambulance Service in terms of funding, it seems to me that, as an open and accountable government, there was some deficiency on your part or the government's part in not informing the Queensland community that there was a problem. I find it disappointing that as I raised the issues over a period of time there was not some consideration of the points I was making. Do you see that, in the time leading up to now, there has been a responsibility on the government to actually inform the Queensland public of the implications of the issue more fully than you have to date?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I believe the member is confusing the estimate he indicated—the \$20 million when we first became the government in 1998—with the problem with the Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme. In terms of coming into government—

**Mr MALONE:** You indicated there was a problem right from the start.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That was a problem caused by the coalition government. The problem was right at the start with regard to the ambulance subscription scheme. I think there has been some confusion over the years in this regard as well. When we as an opposition estimated \$20 million, we were estimating the revenue that would be forgone by the Queensland Ambulance Service. That was pretty right. But then you had to take into account the actual cost of providing services for pensioners, seniors and their dependents.

**Mr MALONE:** And you did not do that in the estimates.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This was not done in the estimates.

**Mr MALONE:** In your estimate of the cost.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** In regard to the figures that we are talking about, we are getting confused—

**Mr MALONE:** You are not confusing me at all.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I think you are confused, with the greatest deal of respect. It is interesting to see you coming back to this pensioners scheme, because—

**Mr MALONE:** It is a serious issue, Minister.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is a very serious issue for me as well. I have sighted in newspaper comments that the opposition, if it becomes a government, will not continue with the \$100 million that we are currently giving to pensioners, Seniors Card holders and subscribers—

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

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will supply the newspaper article that actually quotes the member quite clearly as saying that the opposition will not support that \$100 million, irrespective of how that estimate was made up. Can I commit this government today fully and properly to the pensioners and Seniors Card holders who deserve this service.

**Mr MALONE:** And so they should.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say, irrespective of that estimate that was actually made, these people who contributed taxes, who have worked very hard in all of our communities, deserve that policy. That policy will not be taken away.

**Mr MALONE:** And I support you on that.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is rather different from the newspaper article that I will provide to you which actually quotes you as being very concerned about the \$100 million.

**Mr MALONE:** I am concerned about it.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is the actual cost.

**Mr MALONE:** I am concerned about it.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is the cost in 2002 of providing the service, not back in 1998. I think that is really a smokescreen that you are trying to bring up. We will provide that service for many, many years to come.

**Mr MALONE:** I then go on to the issue that I raised earlier about the independent drug audit in terms of QAS and I take on board what the commissioner has said. But I think there is probably a need to look at that issue a little deeper. From what I am hearing from the commissioner, he is indicating that, basically, the area manager or the OIC actually does the correlation between the drugs used and the drugs that should be left in the cabinet. I ask: do you intend to revise that system? I think that makes it very unaccountable—that you have not got an oversight of some very high-level drugs in use in the QAS, that you are actually relying on a system within the system for accountability. Is there any intention in the longer term to look at an oversight of that that would be more accountable back to the QAS?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Once again, that is an operational question.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I will hand it over to the Ambulance Commissioner. Before I do that, can I just say that on page 26 of the MPS the statement that you quite correctly referred to previously says—

In addition to providing appropriate levels of service, QAS also strives to ensure that standards of service are also maintained and improved. To that end, QAS is developing a comprehensive operational audit process aimed at identifying opportunities for improvement, and through mentoring and support, endeavouring that the highest service standards are provided.

I heard the commissioner say a little while ago the very small numbers that were involved in this.

**Mr MALONE:** How do you know that?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I just heard the commissioner say that.

**Mr MALONE:** That is exactly what I am saying. How do you know that?

**Mr FITZGERALD:** Certainly the situation at present is that there are internal checks and balances in terms of the completion of drugs registers, et cetera, which register the use of controlled substances and ensure that they are used appropriately. The checking of those is, as the member has mentioned, a matter for the area manager or the officer in charge. The other checks and balances that are in place are those that comply, that are managed by the Health Department through its control of poisons regulations, et cetera. I am not sure of the exact extent of the spot audits and things like that that they do.

I would be very comfortable to have a look at whether there is an opportunity to have some form of external audit of drug supplies, et cetera. Can I say, though, that our experience in the past with having centrally based auditing systems is that you find what you are looking for, or what people want you to see, and that generally they are not very successful in terms of identifying the problems.

We are developing other checks and balances, such as trying to draw from the actual case sheet information that is centrally recorded—utilisation rates—and trying to compare those and just checking whether there is any evidence of misuse. All I can say at the moment is that we do not have strong evidence of misuse except in unfortunate instances, but I certainly would be prepared to have a look at whether there is some form of central monitoring of that from central office that would complement the Health Department activities.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you very much for that. I was very pleased that you raised the issue of hands-free communication. I know that your Premier was very keen after the coronial inquiry into the loss of the lives of two firemen at Southport in 1994 that the QFRS should have the very best in terms of hands-free communication. I would have to say that, with a 14-minute response time, you are going to have firemen going into fairly substantial fires for rescue and that it is imperative that they have hands-free communication and the best in the world. I listened very carefully to your answer previously. It seems to me that there are other services throughout the world that would have the very best in technology. Why are we persisting so far out since 1994 in trying to develop a system here in Queensland that I believe would be available somewhere in the rest of the world, surely?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I have given you the figure.

**Mr MALONE:** That is right. I have all that. I am asking the question right now.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** We are well ahead in regard to our commitment.

**Mr MALONE:** Why are we mucking around?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I did indicate in my answer that we feel that we are continuing to advance our professional standing among fire authorities within Australia with this technology, and it is continuing. We are always continuing our investigations. I think for an operational answer I will hand over to the Fire Commissioner.

**Mr MALONE:** I appreciate that.

**Mr JOHNSON:** The statements that you made about the technology being best in the world—unfortunately, fire services throughout the world have struggled with this particular issue for some time now. It relates in particular to two components. One is having the breathing apparatus face piece itself equipped with a microphone and the other is—as we do—having a bone conduction type set-up connected with the helmet. Since 1994 we have gone through and evaluated a wide range of pieces of equipment. The current equipment set-up that we have in operational use was evaluated quite extensively. The difficulty that we have with it at the moment—and in the last month or so we have been working on it with the United Firefighters Union—is that we are re-evaluating that because a lot of the firefighters are actually complaining about the fit itself. We have undertaken very closely with the union to address this problem and get on top of the type of technology that is available.

In fact, there is another opportunity, I suppose, to revisit that in the type of equipment that we are purchasing. We have given a full undertaking to work very closely with our staff and the union to ensure that this problem is addressed and that we ensure that firefighters have this equipment available to them, particularly when internal firefighting activities are undertaken. That is obviously the key component that we are looking for.

**Mr MALONE:** That is right.

**Mr JOHNSON:** It has not been an easy problem to fix. That is true. It has taken a considerable period of time. I can only assure you that as of about a month ago, we re-formed another task force group to re-evaluate again very closely with our firefighters and the union involved to come up with a more reliable, more effective outcome.

**Mr MALONE:** I carry on with an answer to question on notice No. 9, which refers to the urban search and rescue training program. I note that of approximately 1,900 uniform personnel in this state, only 38 have completed the full range of courses under the technical rescue program. Only 23 of those firefighters are located outside of Brisbane. With such a comprehensive program, how come only 38 firefighters have actually completed the full course? What extra resources are you allocating to that training program to have our firefighters up to speed with the full training program?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say that I think you are being a bit tough.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely. I am here to be tough.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Of course you are. That is what the shadow spokesman should be. Can I say that you have got to the bottom of the question.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I just looked at the bottom line of the question. Let us just go through—

**Mr MALONE:** Just answer the question, Minister. It is pretty simple.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am not going to answer the question in that way.

**Mr MALONE:** I do not need the rhetoric; I need the answer.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** You will get the answer within the rhetoric as well. Basically, can I say to you with the greatest deal of respect—

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The training courses within the technical rescue program are able to be undertaken at various times of the year and at various times during a firefighter's career. It is not necessarily the case that a firefighter would undertake all courses within any one year. If you look at the number of firefighters who have completed the QFRS training courses, the individual training courses within the technical rescue program, you will see that there are a range of different courses that are there. For example, for the high-angle 1.25 basic course—1,652 have completed that. If we go down to the swift water awareness course—

**Mr MALONE:** Why have they not all completed it?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** One may well ask—

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely. They might.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I may ask the Fire Commissioner to add to this as well, but can I just say in regard to the work that we are doing and the training that we are doing, I think it is first class. We have a technical rescue training cell currently under construction at the QFRS academy at Whyte Island. That project commenced last year. It is due for completion in September this year. That training cell will be a state-of-the-art facility covering approximately 1.25 hectares, which will be used for the training of specialist staff both internally and externally in a wide variety of rescue disciplines. Interstate agents have expressed an interest in using that as well. Can I say that with this question on notice that was asked of me, when I looked at the response, I thought it was a very comprehensive response. I will just hand over to the commissioner to add to any particular aspect that he would like to add to.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I guess the issue about the numbers or the appearance of smaller numbers is that the high level of technical expertise that is required in individuals is a limiting factor about the number. We maintain an urban search and rescue task force response team which is essentially around the 60 odd mark needed to make that task force effective, so that is why there has been a smaller number of experts trained at the higher level.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you very much for that. I have to say with Whyte Island, though, that I suspect the issue is more about earning income for the service rather than training our people. I make that comment in a fairly offhand sort of way, but maybe next estimates, Minister—

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I just answer what you said there?

**Mr MALONE:** No.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** It is interesting. Just a very quick response. It is interesting that when the Beattie government came into power in June 1998, the then coalition government provided no funding for technical rescue training. So while you are critical and, I think, nitpicking a little, your previous government provided no dollars for this particular training.

**Mr MALONE:** But we started Whyte Island, Minister. QFRS, the fire inspections—I note on page 37 of the MPS, 'percentage of hospitals inspected for fire safety' is 38 per cent; nursing homes and aged care hostels, 55 per cent; licensed premises, 40 per cent—

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Sorry?

**Mr MALONE:** I am just running through the figures quickly. That is page 37 of the MPS.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Yes.

**Mr MALONE:** I am just running through the figures. I was concerned about the forecast for 2002-03 which showed no or little improvement, and I see on MPS page 38 No. 2 that the focus has now changed in light of consideration of available resources. I tried to put a good light on that, Minister, but I find it very difficult to do so. Could you indicate whether there has been a cut back in resources, or the reason for a changed focus in this area?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I just ask, first of all, if you would not mind indicating the areas that you have a concern with, because there are many areas here that I can actually indicate that show a very, very strong growth in regard to the work that we are doing.

**Mr MALONE:** Well, I think that after what happened in Childers and certainly in our aged care homes one would expect that there would be a higher percentage of inspections. Notwithstanding that, what I am saying is that on page 38 No. 2, the words are 'The focus has now changed ... in consideration of available resources', and that is the key question I am asking. What has changed the focus? Why have you changed the focus? Is it indeed a funding deficiency? Why have you changed focus away from fire inspections?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I just indicate the 'number of required inspections of premises (other than private dwellings) completed'. As you can see, in 2001-02 the target was 6,000 and the estimated actual was 11,000.

**Mr MALONE:** That is right.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is where our focus should be and has been. In terms of community safety and awareness programs, these continue to be a very strong focus for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and these activities can be separated into two distinct types: activities mandated by legislation—for example, the assessment of building plans for fire safety features—and, secondly, community service activities such as fire education programs and prevention programs focusing on at-risk groups.

**Mr MALONE:** So this is a change of focus, is it?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** No. Can I continue to go on from there? Firefighters spent more than 140,000 hours carrying out community safety activities during 2001-02. The community service activities are achieving their objectives. For example, in November 2001, a Queensland household survey undertaken by the Office of the Government Statistician showed that 72 per cent of Queensland households have operational smoke alarms or smoke detectors, up from 69.5 per cent two years ago. This equated to an additional 108,000 homes being fitted with smoke alarms in two years.

**Mr MALONE:** The question I am asking, Minister, is what has changed the focus away from nursing homes and hospitals?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Let me just get to that, because I am actually getting to that.

**Mr MALONE:** Truly?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** But I do not think you want a one-sentence response.

**Mr MALONE:** Absolutely.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** You would like me to give you a comprehensive response and that is what I am attempting to do—without your interruptions.

**Mr MALONE:** Can you do it quickly?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** QFRS officers have historically spent many hours inspecting hospitals, nursing homes and licensed premises in line with set targets, even though some of these premises have a relatively low risk factor. As the focus has now changed to high-risk premises—for example, budget accommodation—existing targets for hospitals, nursing homes and licensed premises have been reviewed in consideration of available resources. More emphasis is being placed on the risk factors associated with every individual building and the level of risk of the buildings should determine the priority of the fire safety inspections.

Let me say quite clearly and strongly today that, as is seen in terms of our Sub-Output Statement on page 37, we have a very, very strong focus and program. Can I say, in addition to what I have just said, that Queensland's fire death rate in 2000-01 was 0.3 deaths per 100,000 population, which was one of the lowest in Australia and less than half the national average. The fire death rate per 100,000 in 2000-01 in other jurisdictions were: New South Wales, 0.7; Victoria, 0.3; Western Australia, 0.8.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time limited for questions from non-government members has expired.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Minister, could I take you to page 39 of the MPS under 'Recent Achievements' to dot point five, which refers to the upgrade of QFRS communication networks. Fire alarm monitoring and radio communication are essential for timely responses. What investment has the department made in optimising these vital networks?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for Charters Towers for that question. I can say, first of all, that the question is a very important one in terms of the work that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service does. The service operates an extensive statewide network of radio communications and fire alarm monitoring equipment. These networks are designed, installed and supported by QFRS technical services staff.

Improved radio communications to operational crews is being achieved by conversion of older urban VHF radio networks to UHF. UHF radio systems provide more radio channels and operator options for fire ground instant management. As the radio network expands, coverage dead spots are being identified and technical solutions investigated and implemented. Considerable survey work has already been undertaken to assess, for example, radio coverage in the valleys and mountains of the hinterland and Darling Downs. Other areas being investigated are highway coverage in the Blackbutt, Kilkivan, Tin Can Bay, Ingham, the central coalfields and Hervey Bay areas. Can I just say that from the trip that you and I and the member for Fitzroy made around the central coalfields some couple of months ago, we found that this was a very, very important area in terms of the dropout or the dead spots that one can have.

Redundant urban VHF repeaters are being relicensed and transferred to the rural fire service for use by rural fire brigades. To improve network reliability, existing analogue landline links are being converted to digital. Conversion of network links will continue in 2002-03 as telecommunications carriers reduce support for these analogue services.

I want to say that in terms of the work that we are doing, we really cooperate and work with the Queensland Ambulance Service—another division of our department—the Police Service and other state government departments as well. This cooperation and sharing of resources is testimony of our interagency smart business practice. Recent examples of such developments are at Palm Island, Mount Archer near Rockhampton and Mount Mackay in far-north Queensland as well.

Modern and reliable radio communications and fire alarm monitoring equipment is essential in providing a safer haven for Queenslanders and provides necessary equipment for timely and coordinated responses. I would very much like a bipartisan approach from the opposition in regard to this, because we cannot say the same in terms of Telstra. They can be seen to be blamed for major problems—for example, in the Torres Strait and Cape York, where they defend their lack of redundancy—in regard to the service that is provided in regard to triple zero. So, we are doing the best we can. We would like to see the federal government, through Telstra, provide their best as well.

**Mrs SMITH:** Page 3 of the MPS refers to volunteer protection from liability. What types of cover are provided to our SES and Rural Fire Service volunteers, given the recent insurance industry concerns?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** That is a very important question. I know that when we saw a number of months ago the ruination of a number of areas on the north coast of New South Wales, I know that SES units from right through to the Gold Coast went to the aid of those people. That is what being a Queenslander is all about in many ways.

Can I say that in Queensland my portfolio provides protection to its volunteers who may be the subject of legal proceedings arising from their volunteer duties. The Fire and Rescue Service Act and the state Counter Disaster Organisation Act and the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act all have provisions which provide volunteers with protection from civil liability in most circumstances. The department has examined insurances available for protection of volunteers in circumstances where they incur civil liability in the performance of their voluntary work. I say today to the committee and I assure the committee that I am satisfied that the insurance cover available through the Queensland Government Insurance Fund—the QGIF—will provide adequate protection. Volunteers can also still apply, if necessary, to the department for assistance in defending a civil claim.

In reality, the threat litigation poses to volunteers is very small, but for a volunteer involved in an incident it is not small and they need to have the coverage of the Queensland government in that regard. The protection offered to volunteers is currently the subject of a COAG review nationally and it would be most beneficial to consider further protection of volunteers with the benefit of the COAG recommendations. Can I say that the department is unaware of any occasion when a volunteer has not been supported either by insurance or by the department in defending a claim for damages.

Now, while South Australia has passed the Volunteers Protection Act 2001, protection offered to volunteers in South Australia is not absolute and is subject to a number of qualifications. The effect of the act is to pass responsibility for the act of a volunteer to the community organisation for which the volunteer is actually working. The arrangements currently in place in Queensland would have a similar effect. Where an emergency services volunteer was acting diligently and conscientiously in the course of his or her duties and was sued, the state of Queensland would assume the volunteer's liability.

Can I say that the department, I think, is doing an excellent job of ensuring that volunteers are well covered in the instance that they may be involved in. Our emergency services volunteers are an invaluable resource in the provision of services to the community. It is essential that the Queensland government does everything in its power to protect those volunteers who do the right thing. The legislation before parliament with the Attorney-General will, of course, be extended to lifesavers and others in the community, and that will be showing the great contribution that those volunteers make to our Queensland communities.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Minister, I would like to refer you to page 19, and this refers to the emergency helicopter services. I would like to indicate that I have got an interest in this matter both professionally, as a member of parliament, and personally, as my brother Neil English is an internal crew member on a Queensland emergency services helicopter. The Squirrel helicopter has provided an essential backup service and natural disaster service for many years. It is now 21 years old. What is your department doing to enhance what has been an essential service?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can I say to Mr John English, first of all, the member for Redlands, that Mr Neil English is well regarded by the Department of Emergency Services for the work that he does with our Queensland helicopter service. I have had the pleasure of meeting Neil in that regard and I am informed that his reputation and regard is very, very high.

I am pleased to report that \$8 million in funding will be provided over two years from 2002-03 for replacement of the current Queensland rescue Squirrel helicopter. Officers from my department are currently developing the procurement strategy for replacement aircraft and tenders will be called in this financial year. Can I say that it is a tragedy, of course, that at the age of 21, when most humans are at their peak, this faithful Squirrel is being sent into retirement. It has had 21 faithful years. On the other hand, most Squirrels would not live to the age of 21, so perhaps we should be very grateful in that regard as well.

Seriously, though this aircraft has given Queensland long and faithful service, we know that time and developments in technology have simply passed it by. The Queensland government introduced the Squirrel helicopter into service 21 years ago. Its primary role at that time was to



provide ministerial transportation and support during counter disaster operations. The Squirrel helicopter is based in Brisbane. It is part of the Queensland government helicopter rescue service which also operates the three Bell 412 helicopters and air units in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. The Squirrel helicopter is a visual flight rules VFR helicopter with limited availability at night and in adverse or marginal weather conditions. While the Squirrel helicopter has continued to provide essential support to counter disaster operations and occasional ministerial transportation, its main role has been to back up the Bell 412 helicopters when they are off line for scheduled or unscheduled maintenance. This has an important role in regional Queensland.

The member for Charters Towers and I have a key involvement with the Queensland Rescue Helicopter Service in Townsville. It goes right out to Charters Towers and into that general area. The backup role of the Squirrel helicopter has been a very prominent part of the rescue service operations that we have at both Townsville and Cairns. Indeed, on occasions our Squirrel helicopter has served a very purposeful role; for example, in backing up the Capricorn helicopter service when it was without a helicopter. This is a very worthy upgrade. It is a major purchase that is strong evidence of the Beattie government's commitment to providing our helicopter rescue services with the best possible equipment. The new helicopter will replace the Squirrel. It will be a great asset to Queensland rescue and I have no doubt will be instrumental in saving many lives and in rescuing many Queenslanders from difficult situations.

**The CHAIR:** The Cape York Justice Study is a significant initiative of the Premier and the government to support indigenous communities. How is the minister's department doing its bit to assist in the implementation of this important plan?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is an area that is a hallmark of a Beattie Labor government. In responding to the Cape York Justice Study, my department has played a very purposeful role. The Cape York Justice Study made a number of key recommendations in relation to community and public sector governance. The government has produced a response entitled 'Meeting Challenges, Making Choices' which is a framework for the future. This framework involves a partnership approach between government agencies and Cape York communities to improve the economic development, health, education and training, land and natural resource management and social capacities of those communities. As minister, I am very pleased that the department has developed a framework for action within the draft five-year plan for indigenous Murri and islander communities in north Queensland which contributes to the overall strategy of the government. We have given a very strong commitment to support the processes of developing community leadership, a fair, socially cohesive and vibrant society and to building relationships with local people in relation to interdepartmental problem solving. There are a number of very important parts of this package. This indigenous Australian service delivery enhancement package shows what we will be doing in this financial year. It builds on the very important role that we as a department are already playing. The package will highlight a number of major initiatives.

I highlight today the development and implementation of a drug awareness program for indigenous year 7 children; contribution to a new youth development program in Cape York and the Torres Strait; piloting a joint emergency services Environmental Protection Agency rescue unit in Cape York; looking at the synergy that we can have between our department and the EPA; development of a disaster risk management guide for indigenous communities; establishment of a Cape York and Torres Strait UHF two-way radio network for all emergency services volunteers; and provision of first aid and emergency response equipment to rural and remote communities and outstations. These initiatives, among others in the five-year plan, I believe will contribute to safer and more supportive indigenous communities as well as contributing to 'Meeting Challenges, Making Choices', the Queensland government's response to the Cape York Justice Study, and our ongoing commitment to the indigenous people of Cape York. In many ways this enhancement package seeks to align the department's delivery services to the state government's priorities for a better quality of life and safer and more supportive communities, in this case specialising in the work that we not only will do in the Cape York and Torres Strait but also in places like Palm Island and Doomadgee and other parts of the gulf and other DOGIT communities in Queensland.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** MPS page 30 refers to the CPR 2000 project. Since in my previous life I earned my living instructing first aid for both the QAS and the Red Cross, I would be very interested—and since I am also one of the CPR 2000 people—if the minister could inform us of the future plans for CPR 2000, this already very successful project.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am very pleased to report back to Mrs Scott, given her long involvement in this area, that the CPR 2000 program, coupled with advances in technology and training adopted

by the Queensland Ambulance Service, has contributed to a dramatic improvement in the survival rate of people suffering a cardiac arrest outside of the hospital environment. As I indicated to a previous question, a cardiac arrest is what happens when the heart stops suddenly, resulting in a loss of consciousness. If untreated, all these patients die. I know that recently a number of members of parliament and their staff from electorate offices took part in the CPR demonstration here at Parliament House. I remember taking part in one of those a few years ago when Merri Rose was the Minister for Emergency Services. On that occasion I said, 'This is something we all need in a household.' Quite often, if I have the qualification as a 55-year-old male, that is good for me if I am treating someone else. But I need someone to have that training to treat me if I possibly need it, touch wood, on some occasion. When survival rates from out of hospital for cardiac arrest were first mentioned in Queensland, just 15 years ago, one per cent of patients were revived.

We now have seen this major contribution of our CPR 2000 program. It is an excellent program. It was initiated by the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland branch of the Australian Resuscitation Council. The CPR 2000 model has been developed to allow non-health professionals to teach low-cost CPR in their own local group or community using a peer trainer method of instruction. The scheme started in July 1999 and since then has facilitated the training of more than 10,000 Queenslanders in CPR. It has been adopted by all types of groups, including Australian Red Cross branches, government departments and many services, sporting and community clubs and organisations. The CPR 2000 training program has been tailored for people most likely to witness a cardiac arrest. Unfortunately, that is people over the age of 40, particularly females. I say 'unfortunately' probably for the male part of the community. It is targeted to those most likely to witness a cardiac arrest. The program not only encourages Queenslanders to acquire these vital life saving skills but makes the training much more readily available. Since CPR 2000 training began, statistics indicate that bystander intervention has almost doubled. Members will have seen the media articles that I have seen where fortuitously someone who had CPR training has meant the difference between life and death or the difference between major or a lesser injury.

**Mrs SMITH:** Will the minister inform the committee about Smart State initiatives implemented by the Department of Emergency Services?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The Beattie government's Smart State vision centres on positioning Queensland as a leader in emerging technologies such as information technology, communications and the biosciences. As Minister for Emergency Services, I am pleased to say that my department is contributing to the achievement of the Smart State goal by implementing innovative training and education systems which utilise state-of-the-art technologies and facilities to optimise skill development to DES staff. Queensland's decentralised population means we have a big challenge in providing services and managing training of our staff in regional and remote communities. The online programs in use by my department are designed to overcome that tyranny of distance. The Department of Emergency Services online education campus system is designed to replace existing databases to manage the administration, development, delivery and reporting of all professional development within the department. The system will give staff and volunteers in remote and indigenous communities more equity of access to numerous training processes necessary for them to keep their skills up to date and to prepare for career advancement. It will also facilitate the management of training and of training record-keeping.

Another Smart State initiative of which I am very proud, complementary to the online campus already mentioned, is the online DES volunteer portal I launched late last year. The portal is the first initiative of its type in Queensland and, to our knowledge, Australia. The portal provides a unique service to the DES volunteer community, which numbers 85,000 people across the state. The information technology initiative has improved service delivery and enhanced community safety outcomes through provision of access to information to the volunteer community, establishment of stronger relationships between volunteer groups, enhancing communication throughout the department, and enhancing skill development. In very much an on the ground way, it does allow members of rural fire brigades and SESs to be able to communicate with the department, if you like, with a bottom-up strategy. It also allows our department from the top down to communicate with those units and individual units, if you like, of RFS and SES on the ground as well. Importantly, it also allows a number of the units of RFS and SES to actually communicate with each other as well, if you like, on a horizontal plane. This volunteer portal is a very important part of our work.

**Mr FLYNN:** The minister is on the home run now. Briefly, I refer to my questions on notice. Part A referred to the provision of replacement flood boats. The minister has indicated that a total of 73 flood boats will be replaced. There are in fact 193 in the fleet. There was some considerable concern by members of SES in various areas about the condition of boats, which may vary. One cannot put a set formula on it. As the minister said, it depends on what they are used for as to what condition they are in. The minister has given a fairly comprehensive answer for which I thank him, but can the minister assure me that the remainder of the boats which are of some age will in fact be replaced in the near future?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I thank the member for that question. I gave a fairly comprehensive answer before, but can I just highlight that as minister I see these areas of the SES as being very important right the way across Queensland. It is unfortunate that it was an area of neglect for many years. When the Beattie government was elected in June 1998 it bought together the \$1.5 million program for flood boats over a four-year flood boat program. That has allowed the SES units right across the state to especially be able to be involved in that program. In 2001-02 the funding that I mentioned before of \$597,000 included \$250,000 in special initiative funding for the replacement of aged flood boats and outboard motors as well. If we look at our program, it is important to say that we are replacing not only flood boats but also outboard motors. In many ways that state government initiative of funding \$1.5 million over four years for the replacement of non-compliant and aged flood boats was a very important part of the program. Since the start of the flood boat replacement program, all 193 boats located throughout the state now comply as commercial vessels with the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Regulations of 1995.

In respect of the work that we are doing, we have had a major strategy, which is contained in our implementation plan for the SES—the strategic plan 2001-05—to have unit safety audits. Those unit safety audits have been completed for SES units for the far-north, the north, Mackay, Darling Downs, metropolitan, south-east, north coast and Burnett districts to provide the department, local governments and SES local controllers and district managers with accurate information on which to base future operational and strategic planning. The findings of the audits will be used to facilitate the development of a long-term major equipment management plan and the targeting of training and equipment resources throughout Queensland. Through those audits, I am very keen to track down the areas in need of equipment. I can assure you that this will be a very important part of the work that Counter Disaster and Rescue Services does over the next few years.

**Mr FLYNN:** The people I spoke to would appreciate your time to directly approach you about those concerns. I ask: would you give an undertaking to meet these senior members of the SES who will put to you what I have?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** If you would like to pass on to me the units involved, I will ensure that someone from Counter Disaster and Rescue Services visits them, makes an assessment and reports back to me. If I am there myself and have the time, I will be happy—

**Mr FLYNN:** I think you will find they may have done that, which is why they want to approach you, Minister.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I would be very keen for some of them to meet me here—they are not too far away—and pursue their concerns.

**Mr FLYNN:** I refer you to the second part of my question in relation to radios. There is still significant disquiet amongst people at the coalface.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Which question are you on?

**Mr FLYNN:** I am on part (b) of question No. 10 on notice. I expressed the SES workers' concerns about the state of their communications devices, which they say, to use their vernacular, are archaic and insufficient for their needs. You have indicated a replacement program. But in your reply you have said 'which is appropriate to their operational needs'. I would have thought in these days where emergency services are required to respond in any number of environments, not just in their own backyard but also in assisting other people, that communications has to be in first-class order and not merely sufficient according to some arbitrary theorem?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The government works very hard on determining the operational needs of the different SES units. We talked about flood boats before. We are now talking about communications. The government does not have an unrestricted bucket of money. We would like to have one, just as I am sure the member for Lockyer would.

We have been able to implement major changes to our budgets. In the Counter Disaster and Rescue Services we have seen changes right across-the-board, including funding for the communications systems that you have been discussing with us. The budget allocation for 2001-02 benefited 49 SES groups, with the issue of new and replacement communications equipment. I will give you an idea of how we spent those dollars. I am sure that those 49 SES groups would be very thankful for the help that they have been given. For example, four new repeaters were put at Theodore, Jericho, Noosa and Tin Can Bay; 20 new mobiles for SES groups in the Burnett, central west and Capricorn districts; the replacement of 137 mobiles for SES groups in the north, far north, Mackay, Capricorn, Darling Downs, south-east and metropolitan districts; the replacement of 30 repeaters across the state; and 57 hand-held portable two-way radios were purchased for SES groups statewide.

In addition to the \$200,000 estimated actual for last financial year for new and replacement communication equipment, an additional \$100,000 was provided through the reallocation of CDRS funding to support the replacement of communications accessories, such as battery analysers, battery packs and replacement batteries also. In the year to come the budget allocation of \$160,000 for 2002-03 will benefit groups right across the state. Equipment will be provided to a range of units throughout Queensland. The funds will also be directed to all districts for maintenance of existing communications equipment also. In terms of priorities, those district managers can work with the units on ensuring that the priorities they have there are the ones that we meet best at that particular time.

**Mr FLYNN:** In closing, I refer you to the second dot point in your reply to part (b) of my question. You stated—

From time to time there are problems experienced with communications equipment. However, in more cases than not this can be attributed to operator and daily maintenance issues.

What evidence is there to suggest that the operators of radios are responsible for communication failures?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I think that is a technical question, which I would like to ask Mr Ian Rector, the Director of SES and VMR, to answer part of.

**Mr FLYNN:** Unless there is direct evidence, I have to say that it is pretty poor to be pointing the finger at the operator of the equipment rather than at the equipment without such evidence. I would be pleased to hear it.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Have you got evidence to the contrary?

**Mr FLYNN:** No, I think it is up to you and your department to suggest that there is.

**Mr RECTOR:** The evidence that we base that sort of reply on comes directly from our radio technicians who are working consistently and continually throughout the state. One of the major problems that we have is that in some areas we have a fairly high turnover of volunteers, and radios are a very attractive toy to play with. We have a real problem in keeping the skill levels up in terms of people even charging radios. They will put them on, leave them on, cook the batteries and, when they want to use them, they are not working. Also, when they go to use radios they may not be familiar with the types of frequencies that they need to use and get onto the wrong frequency and then find it is very difficult for them to maintain contact with different people.

**Mr FLYNN:** A question of a need for further training is what we have just identified.

**Mr RECTOR:** That is right. I think the brief goes on to say that we are putting considerable effort into the training of volunteers, but it is an ongoing task.

**Mr MALONE:** I am very conscious of the time. We have only five minutes remaining. We are both enjoying this so much we should set aside a whole day next time.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Can we talk about that?

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, as you well know, I have great support and affection for the SES groups and all volunteers within the DES. One area I have some concerns about is the SES cadets. You need only answer yes to this question. I challenge you, minister, to put up your best SES volunteers against my hand-picked cadets. I challenge you to a contest here in Brisbane to prove that their training is as good, if not better, and they can do the job as good, if not better, than your permanent SES volunteers. If you say yes, we will organise that.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am very tempted. Can I tell you why? The SES cadet scheme in Sarina is a very good scheme. I know how much work your coordinator of the SES and Counter Disaster has put into that.

**Mr MALONE:** Just say yes.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The SES across Queensland exemplifies the work that volunteers can do in our communities. The SES units in the Sarina area have a very high level of performance. I know there has been some difference of opinion in terms of the ratio of adults to cadets. We are working through those to the satisfaction of both ourselves and the Sarina people. The SES cadet unit in Sarina is one of the biggest cadet groups that we have. They are very keen and you should be very proud of them as the local member.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, thank you for that, yes. It is on record. Briefly, I congratulate you on increasing the grant for the rescue helicopters of service providers. Over the past two or three years, because of low exchange rates and high fuel costs, most providers have had a very difficult time in providing those services. Is your department confident that the \$825,000 grant is sufficient to cover the needs of the rescue service? It is imperative that that service continue to its current very high standard.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I agree that it is imperative that the service continue to its very high standard. The community based helicopter services in Mackay, Rockhampton, the Sunshine Coast, the Gold Coast and Bundaberg have the support of the government that they deserve. That is why we increased the grant by over \$200,000. They are now receiving an annual grant of \$852,000. It is important to say also that, as you would be aware, those community helicopter providers receive funds from community fundraising and do an excellent job in that regard. But they also receive important sponsorship. I was pleased to be able to launch with the RACQ last year the very important sponsorship that is being provided by the RACQ. I was involved in Townsville just a couple of weeks ago at our government helicopter service, because it is a recipient of the sponsorship from the RACQ as well—

**Mr MALONE:** The point is that it has been increased by only about \$156,000 from 1996, when the coalition put it in place. There has not been a big increase in government funding for the rescue helicopter. They do get sponsorship, but the government support is relatively miserly.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I would not say that \$852,000 to each of our community helicopter providers is miserly.

**Mr MALONE:** I am talking about the increase.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I heard what the members at the estimates committee were saying to me last year. I took that on in a very positive way. At the mid-year review we gave them a one-off payment of \$50,000. We have now increased the funding to providers again by over \$200,000.

**The CHAIR:** The time for non-government members' questions has expired. I now call the member for Redlands.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Page 31 of the MPS provides statistics on the number of baby capsules hired. The safety of infants in motor vehicles is a paramount issue for parents in the community. As a happy consumer of the baby capsule hire scheme in 1999, I would like to ask: what plans does the Department of Emergency Services have to enhance the baby capsule hire service to provide assistance to parents in this vital area?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** I am sure you would all agree that the safety of infants in vehicles should be a top priority—indeed the paramount priority—for parents, the community and this government. Regrettably, baby capsules are relatively expensive and outside the reach of many low income families. I am very pleased to be able to say that the Queensland Ambulance Service is doing its part to improve the safety of infants in vehicles with its excellent baby capsule hire program. It is very pleasing to hear that the member for Redlands was a recipient of that program some time ago. In fact, the QAS is raising the priority of its baby capsule program to complement the government's strategic objectives on community safety. A review of the baby capsule program will be completed during this financial year, including enhanced training in business systems, to improve the capacity of the ambulance regions in the implementation and management of the product. These improvements will allow the QAS to continue to more effectively expand the service in subsequent years.

Currently, the QAS offers the baby capsule hire service at selected ambulance stations statewide. Some 4,900 baby capsules are available for hire. As you can see, we have a fairly large number of baby capsules out there. To make this service affordable, the hire and fitting fee for a QAS baby safety capsule is kept to a low \$55. As a parent who some 20 years ago or even less had a couple of kids in these baby capsules, I would have paid \$55 to even be able to install them, because they are the hardest things to install. The fitting fee for a privately owned infant

child restraint is \$16.50. I think that is a very fair rate. Some 990 privately owned infant child restraints were fitted by QAS so far this financial year.

As a part of this service to the community, the QAS also checked more than 3,000 privately owned infant child restraints at nursing mothers associations, family day care associations, district health services and various shopping centres throughout Queensland. QAS is a member of CREST, the Child Restraint Education and Safe Travel Committee, and takes a very close interest in child safety. I am very pleased with the Ambulance Service's contribution to child safety. What better way to service the community for a safer and more supportive environment than in the provision of baby capsules to protect our very young Queenslanders from injury and death in road accidents. It really horrifies me when I see any accident that occurs with a young child or a baby when injury could have been prevented with the hire of these capsules. This particular program has my very strong support as minister.

**The CHAIR:** Page 6 of the MPS highlights that the department contributes to the government's priority of safer and more supportive communities through partnerships with other agencies providing community safety, injury prevention and community education. Could you provide an example of your department's involvement in these collaborative partnerships?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** The Queensland government is keen to create safer and more supportive communities, and to achieve this goal an inter-sectorial community based partnership is required. This involves human service agencies working together with key private sector stakeholders, including local government and community groups, to increase community awareness of safe practices in and around the home for our young children. Partnerships have been formed through the child injury project with relevant government agencies, and a strategic alliance has been forged with Queensland Health to foster innovative and leading-edge injury intervention strategies. We have two pilot communities—Mount Isa and Mackay.

The aim is to reduce the incidence of injury in children from nought to four years of age to rates commensurate with urban areas. The objectives of the project are, firstly, to develop an inter-sectorial injury prevention strategy targeting injuries in the home that addresses the most common causes for Queensland children in rural and remote areas; secondly, to undertake a three- to five-year trial of the injury prevention strategy in specific rural and remote communities to reduce the rural urban differences; and, thirdly, to collect pre-intervention and post-intervention data to identify the full measure of the effect of the interventions and any background trends as well.

The inaugural meeting of the project reference group was held on 25 March this year with a further meeting held in June. The community consultation process has commenced in the pilot locations of Mackay and Mount Isa. Feedback from these sessions has been extraordinarily positive, with attendees expressing unanimous support for the projects in both locations. Furthermore, small project teams have been established to progress the development. A business case is being finalised by Professor Rod McClure of Injury Prevention and Control Australia Ltd. This collaborative approach will enable services to be delivered more in line with what the local needs are. The community will drive the development of local solutions and government agencies, and community organisations will work together with local community representatives to build capacity and implement appropriate strategies for each community as well.

The Department of Emergency Services has also formed a collaborative partnership with the Department of Police to broaden the crime prevention focus of Neighbourhood Watch to include broader community safety initiatives aimed at reducing the risk of injury and improving community safety. This program has been piloted in Maryborough, Mackay and Camp Hill and is currently being evaluated. As a local member as well as Minister for Emergency Services, I have had the pleasure in the last few years to be able to be involved in the launches of the Neighbourhood Watch program in Garbutt and also in West End in Townsville in my electorate. When you look at the community infrastructure that we have for Neighbourhood Watch and you see what they are doing primarily in the area of security of someone's home, you can see that social infrastructure being used so much and so well in the area of community safety overall. We are now looking with the Minister for Police at broadening that to take in a number of areas of community safety that are being managed by my department.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Dot point 1 on page 35 of the MPS refers to the efforts made by the QFRS to reduce the potential for another Childers tragedy. This tragedy highlighted the need for reform of fire safety standards in budget accommodation. How has your department worked with the Department of Local Government and Planning to improve this safety?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Before answering that, Mr Chairman, I do have the answer of the legal services that I could provide to Mr Malone before finishing if you permit me to do that at some appropriate time. In response to the Childers backpacker fire on 23 June 2000, a multiagency task force was established to review current fire safety laws in Queensland. The task force examined the standard of fire safety in existing budget accommodation buildings including backpacker hostels, boarding houses, supported accommodation and hotels. The task force prepared a report that was noted by cabinet on 2 October 2000. The report concluded that there were inadequate fire safety standards to protect the lives of occupants at a significant number of budget accommodation buildings. The report recommended improvements to fire safety standards in budget accommodation buildings and to general fire safety standards.

I am very proud to be able to say that, as members would be aware, our parliamentary colleague and my ministerial colleague the Hon. Nita Cunningham on 11 December 2001 introduced the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. It was passed by the parliament and commenced on 1 July this year. The legislation is supported by the standard building regulation of the Building Act 1995 and the new building fire safety standard for budget accommodation. We have worked very well with the range of stakeholders that we had to work with. We had statewide workshops in order for consultation to take place before the bill was introduced. We were out there doing those workshops with Local Government and other stakeholders. In close consultation with stakeholders we are developing a safer living environment for some of the most vulnerable people in our community, and of course I refer to those who live in boarding houses and other low-cost accommodation.

**Mrs SMITH:** Still on the issue of building fire safety, a large number of premises comply with fire safety standards. However, there are a small number which fail to comply. What mechanisms does your department have in place to deal with non-compliance?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** As mentioned previously, we were shocked by the Childers fire and the fact that 15 young lives were lost. We really set time aside very quickly right from the word go to put together a multiagency task force to review our fire laws. Building owners and occupiers have a responsibility to ensure the fire safety of their buildings, including the responsibility to rectify any breaches of fire safety requirements. I am pleased to be able to say that a majority of Queensland owners and occupiers are meeting these responsibilities. However, for the small number who are slow to act the QFRS now has a prosecution option. Can I say that as minister we will not hesitate to take that option. The infringement notice system will encourage occupiers and owners to comply with building fire safety requirements. On-the-spot fines range from \$75 to \$375 for individuals and from \$375 to \$1,875 for corporations.

Since the system was introduced on 1 December last year, 14 on-the-spot fines and 41 notices have been issued. The value of the fines paid to QFRS is about \$4,785, with another \$9,750 of unpaid fines forwarded to the State Penalties Enforcement Register. The first prosecution brought to court resulted in guilty pleas to 13 of the 15 charges. The magistrate is yet to make his decision known. Two other prosecutions are scheduled to begin later this month. As minister I believe that building fire safety is a serious business. This on-the-spot fine system should leave building owners and occupiers in no doubt that we are very serious about enforcing the fire safety standards. Perhaps with your indulgence, Mr Chairman, I could now read into the record the—

**The CHAIR:** You do not need to do that. You can simply table it and it will be part of the record.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much. I table for the benefit of the committee the answer to the question that was asked by the member for Mirani for the breakdown of total legal services. I table that for the committee's information.

**Mr ENGLISH:** I note on page 31 of the MPS the number of community education certificates issued increased from a projected 52,000 to 55,000 to actually over 59,000. Could you please expand on the significant advances that have been made in the delivery of community education to all Queenslanders?

**Mr REYNOLDS:** This is a very important question. The QAS is improving its customer services and establishing long-term contracts with a number of commercial industrial clients to ensure the continued positive growth of QAS community education businesses. If we look at the number of certificates first of all, these have been going up very well over the last few years. For example, the 2001-02 target we published was 52,000 to 55,000. Our estimated actual was 61,000. We would estimate about 66,000 certificates will be issued this year. QAS community

education provides the most diverse and complete packages of nationally accredited commercial first aid, cardiopulmonary and injury prevention training courses that are available. These courses better prepare the community through education to respond appropriately to instances of sudden illness and injury pending the arrival of an ambulance. The QAS has played a leading role in fact in the development and funding of the CPR2000 project in association with the Australian Resuscitation Council of Queensland and Queensland Health. We are continually developing user-friendly modalities for first-aid training such as self-paced packages available as hard copy or on the Internet. QAS has 17 first-aid courses that are nationally accredited and QAS maintains registered provider status for each of them as well. That gives us the ability to be able to train and deliver in the way that we have.

The senior first-aid course is also accredited in New South Wales through New South Wales WorkCover. QAS also offers commercially a range of injury prevention courses designed to educate specific community groups on injury prevention techniques, including One Step Ahead. The aim is to familiarise carers of children from nought to five years with basic strategies to reduce the risk of injury occurring in and around a residential and/or professional day care setting, doing so by introducing such techniques as hazard identification, risk assessment and countermeasure application. Farmsafe is another one. With Farmsafe we aim to familiarise people with basic strategies to reduce the risk of injury occurring in and around the farm setting, doing so by introducing such techniques as hazard identification, risk assessment and countermeasure applications. The other one that is a very important one for the elderly is Older and Wiser, which familiarises people with basic strategies to reduce injuries occurring to people over 65 years of age in and around residential settings. These are some very important programs that QAS actually delivers.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland 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. This hearing is now suspended until 4.15 p.m.

**Mr REYNOLDS:** Thank you very much, Mr Chairman.

Sitting suspended from 3.58 p.m. to 4.16 p.m.



**POLICE AND CORRECTIVE SERVICES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. T. McGrady, Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province

**Police Service**

Comr R. Atkinson, Police Commissioner

Mr R. McGibbon, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations)

Mr R. Warry, Deputy Chief Executive (Resource Management)

Mr J. Just, Director of Finance

**Corrective Services**

Ms H. Ringrose, Director-General

Mr P. Severin, Deputy Director-General

Ms J. Briant, Director, Finance and Administration

Ms S. Armstrong, Principal Project Officer

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**The CHAIR:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The next portfolio to be examined is that of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services. I welcome you all here to this hearing. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute, and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given of the expiration of these time limits. The sessional orders require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in their transcript.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Police and Corrective Services to be open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish you may make an opening statement, but would you please limit it to no more than five minutes?

**Mr McGRADY:** Thanks, Mr Chairman. Members of the committee, this year's state budget is a good budget containing substantial increases for both the Police Service and the Department of Corrective Services. These increases demonstrate our commitment to not only being tough on crime but also tough on the causes of crime. The Police and Corrective Services portfolios have seen continuing record levels of expenditure under our Labor government, and this year, of course, will be no exception. Whereas so much has been achieved already, I can assure the members of the committee and, indeed, the people of Queensland that this government will not become complacent about law and order; we simply cannot afford to.

In regard to the Police budget, our government has increased funding to the Police Service in this budget by 6.8 per cent, taking the operational budget to \$917 million. The operational budget is used by the Police Service to carry out its daily duties in providing service delivery. The capital budget is \$94 million, which represents an increase of 9.1 per cent over the last year. Capital funding is used for a range of matters, including land and property acquisition and the rolling capital works program.

Funding provided in this budget will support a number of major initiatives, such as: 307 additional police positions and 47 civilian positions, keeping the government on track to deliver the promised police strength of 9,100 officers by the year 2005; \$21 million for information technology, new police beats at Manoora, Redbank Plains, Narangba, Mango Hill and Beachmere, and shopfronts at Coolangatta, Springfield, Milton and Paddington and, of course, Deception Bay; and the establishment of new tactical crime squads at Toowoomba, Mackay, Rockhampton, Ipswich and South Brisbane and the separation of the joint squad at the Gold Coast and Logan into two single squads. The squads will have a particular emphasis on serious crime, including property crime and supply of drug offences; \$100,000 for illicit market scans to

further enhance the service's capabilities to address drugs; and all eight police regions will receive a budget increase.

In addition, a further \$30.5 million will be expended under the service's 10-year capital works plan. This includes the government's special allocation of \$12 million in capital enhancement funding—and that is above and beyond the normal base capital works allocation—to further progress police capital works projects throughout the state. A number of projects will be completed in this present financial year, including the refurbishment of the Alderley police depot; a new 24-hour police station at Calamvale; a new police station and two residential units at Fraser Island; extension to the Tannum Sands Police Station; replacement of the Mount Isa district headquarters and watch-house; and stage 1 of the Toowoomba Police Station project.

Major projects that are being planned or commenced throughout this coming financial year include: a new district headquarters at Gympie; stage 2 of the Toowoomba Police Station project; Hervey Bay Police Station extensions; a replacement police station at Halifax; a new watch-house at Inala; new 24-hour police stations at Loganholme and Mackay North; a replacement police station and watch-house at Palm Island; a new residence at Mornington Island; and replacement of the Mundingburra Police Station district and regional officers. A further \$31.5 million will be directed towards the purchase of motor vehicles.

Moving to the other side of my portfolio—the Department of Corrective Services received an increase of \$13 million, or 3.1 per cent, in this year's state budget, taking its operational budget to \$394 million. This funding boost will assist in ensuring Queensland's prison system continues to be of the highest standard in the world.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The first period of questions is allotted to the non-government members. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, what provision has been made in this budget for a new enterprise bargaining agreement for the Police Service?

**Mr McGRADY:** As the member for Callide would be aware, negotiations are due to commence very, very soon on the EBA between the government and the relevant unions which have members in the Police Service. As you would be aware, the government has certain criteria which it has placed on the table. The cost of meeting the Police Union's salary claims in full would be approximately \$220 million. The service has been provided with funding for a 3 per cent increase in salaries from 1 July. If the increase is over 3 per cent the service would—and I say 'if' depending on what negotiations take place—the service would expect and, I believe, receive that additional amount from Treasury. But again, I have to make it perfectly clear that the negotiations are just about to commence. At this point in time we have laid an offer on the table, and no doubt there will be lengthy discussions.

But can I just say this for the sake of this committee hearing: the whole issue of enterprise bargaining will be conducted between the Police Service and the Department of Industrial Relations. Whilst the portfolio minister will be kept informed of the progress of the negotiations, we will not be participating. That will be done by the Department of IR.

**Mr SEENEY:** Given the current situation with the Nurses Union, has the service made any provision for an industrial campaign associated with those enterprise bargaining agreement negotiations?

**Mr McGRADY:** I think it is fair to say that whenever enterprise bargaining is contemplated you have to participate in the normal routine of industrial relations. Many things are said leading up to negotiations but, as far as I am concerned, I believe that the Police Service will continue to do what it does best; that is, look after the interests of the people of Queensland. No doubt there will be a little bit of argy-bargy between now and when the agreement is signed. As you, I and everybody in this room know, that is part and parcel of enterprise bargaining.

**Mr SEENEY:** So you have not made any specific preparations in anticipation of a prolonged industrial campaign?

**Mr McGRADY:** I do not anticipate a prolonged industrial campaign. The people of the Queensland Police Service in the main are decent, honest, respectable people and they understand the commitment they have to the service. I do wish that people would not start making suggestions that there will be a long, protracted industrial dispute. For heaven's sake, these are good, solid Queenslanders we are discussing today.

**Mr SEENEY:** Page 1-7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement provides the output summary of the expenditure allocated for Police. I note from your introductory statement your claim of a 6.8

per cent increase in overall funding. After accounting for inflation, the real per capita expenditure shows cuts to spending on general policing of 1.6 per cent, cuts to the preservation of public safety of 4.4 per cent and a cut in expenditure for reducing major and organised crime of 1.7 per cent. In fact, without an 11 per cent increase in real terms for the budget for traffic policing, speed management and camera operations, the Police budget this year would be less than last year. The only area in which there are increases is traffic policing and camera operations. Do these budget figures accurately reflect the priorities of the Queensland Police Service?

**Mr McGRADY:** As I mentioned in my opening remarks, the service has two specific government funded allocations, which I gave the figures for. Output funding relates to those activities associated with direct service delivery. This funding is used to meet all recurrent expenses in the service, such as salaries, travel, motor vehicles and the like. At this point I will ask John Just, the financial officer of the Queensland Police Service, to elaborate on this. I know that there was a similar claim last year. In fairness to the committee, the financial officer should explain in detail exactly what increases the service received from the Queensland government.

**Mr JUST:** In 2001-02 the service received \$833.3 million for output funding, which is the general operating costs. In 2002-03—this is specific funding from the government—we received \$890 million. That is an increase of approximately \$56.7 million, which is a growth of 6.8 per cent. On top of that, the contribution from the government for equity funding has risen from \$23.1 million in 2001-02 to \$34.2 million in 2002-03, which is an increase of \$11 million. Therefore, the total increase the government has given the service in 2002-03 is \$67.8 million. This is a growth in total of 7.9 per cent. There have been some claims of a reduction in own source revenue. That own source revenue reduction is purely due to a change in the way outsourced police have been charged. It has nil effect on the total cost of running the service. So the true contribution by government for this year has been a 7.9 per cent increase. That is on both operating costs and equity.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, on a number of occasions you have told the parliament that as minister you do not get involved in operational matters. You have made that statement a number of times in answer to questions in the parliament. However, you must have a role in deciding the priorities for resource allocation that I referred to in my previous question. What input did you as minister have in deciding the allocated budget expenditure for each of those programs? Does the increase in priority for traffic policing and camera operations reflect an influence that you had as minister, or does it reflect a government policy position?

**Mr McGRADY:** I think the Police portfolio is somewhat different from most other portfolios within government. You are to some extent guided by the recommendations of Fitzgerald. There is a clear distinction between policy matters, which relate to the minister and are the responsibility of the minister and the government, and straightforward operational matters, which are the sole province of the commissioner and the Police Service. I try not to involve myself in operational matters.

When you have a commissioner of the calibre of our current commissioner, he and the minister will have a good working relationship. There is nothing wrong with that. In fact, I believe it is essential in the interests of the Queensland Police Service and of course the government. Obviously when budget time comes around we do discuss a number of aspects. Straight-out operational matters are the sole responsibility of the commissioner and his executive team. However, when we are talking about where certain developments will take place, where projects will happen, as the representative of the people of this state I certainly do have an input. I have an input in all policy matters, but I do emphasise the fact that in my opinion there is an excellent working relationship between the commissioner's office and my office. As I said a moment ago, I believe that in the interests of our state that has to be the case.

**Mr SEENEY:** I refer to the allocation of resources in this budget, which reflect the priorities of the Police Service for the coming year. Given that the priorities seem once again to be traffic policing and camera operations—that is the only area that has had a real increase; it has had an 11 per cent increase in real terms—is that a result of a deliberate government policy position or is it a result of recommendations that have been made by the Police Service from an operational point of view?

**Mr McGRADY:** I will take this opportunity to talk about traffic activity. There are some people out there who feel that there is something wrong with the police or the Department of Transport being involved in traffic duties. The facts are that around the world today there are probably more deaths as a result of speed, not wearing seatbelts, fatigue and the like than as a result of anything else. I venture to say that if there were 300 plus murders a year people would be

howling for a royal commission or other forms of inquiry. People would not tolerate over 300 murders a year, yet some people tend to believe that there is nothing at all wrong with speeding and that people should sit back and allow this to happen.

As the commissioner often says, some years ago people accepted drinking and driving. If somebody got picked up for drinking and driving, it was seen as just too bad. 'Poor old Johnny got done last night.' Those days are gone, and people no longer treat as a joke that somebody has been picked up for drink-driving. In fact, quite the opposite is correct. The same thing will happen in relation to speeding. We are losing well over 300 people every year as a result of accidents on the road. So let us not talk about speed cameras and the activities of the traffic branch as if they are public enemy No. 1.

We often talk about these fixed cameras around the state as if every time you turn a corner, there is a fixed camera sitting there. These cameras are placed in positions as a result of a committee. These people decide where these cameras could go. I think from memory we have about 24 sites in Queensland. So let us get away from this nonsense that the traffic branch, the people who are trying to reduce speed on the roads, are public enemy No. 1. They are not. They are doing a service to this state and it is something that I fully support.

As an example, last year the Queensland police conducted speed camera operations for 45,000 hours throughout the whole of the state. This represents less than 1.5 per cent of the total number of hours spent on traffic policing, speed management and camera operations. Police spent 3.8 times as many hours conducting breath tests as they did operating speed cameras. So I hope, with that answer, I have been able to shed some light on the role of the traffic branch.

**Mr SEENEY:** I refer to the comments of your colleague the Attorney-General earlier today in the same estimates hearings that there is no whole-of-government strategy to increase or reduce the number of penalties referred to the State Penalties Enforcement Register. I also refer you to budget paper No. 3 in the economic and revenue outlook, page 39, the line item on transport and traffic fees. Your government has projected that it will reap a massive \$120.7 million from these fines from 2002-03. Given that this is a \$3.3 million increase on the actual revenue received from the last financial year, where is this additional projected revenue going to come from?

**Mr McGRADY:** I was not present, obviously, when the Attorney-General made his comments about SPER and some other points that the member has made. Could I take that question on notice and get back to you in the prescribed time?

**Mr SEENEY:** The question relates to the projected income from traffic fines—\$120.7 million.

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Chairman, I will take that on notice, if you do not mind, and I will get back to the committee.

**The CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Mr SEENEY:** The only reference to the Attorney-General was in relation to the fact that there was no deliberate government strategy. That related to the two questions that you asked earlier. I cannot really see the point of taking it on notice. I would have thought that you would have been able to justify the \$120.7 million figure that is in the budget and explain to us why that figure is \$3.3 million—

**Mr McGRADY:** I will come back later on in the session, if you do not mind.

**The CHAIR:** The member for Callide, the next question.

**Mr SEENEY:** I draw your attention to the Queensland Police Service's annual statistical review, which shows an unacceptable, in my view, clear-up rate of property crime in a number of statistical regions, for example, 10 per cent of unlawful entries being cleared up on the Gold Coast, 12 per cent of unlawful entries being cleared up in Ipswich and only 22 per cent of other thefts being cleared up in Toowoomba. Were you aware of these figures when you decided the priorities for the spending for the Police Service in the current budget documents? Do you believe that it is fair enough for something like 85 per cent of Queensland people who have their homes and businesses broken into to basically have to cop it sweet?

**Mr McGRADY:** Preliminary figures from the police indicate that there has been a reduction in the number of reported property offences between 1 July 2001 and 31 May this year compared to the same period the previous year. Offences against property fell by 6.5 per cent. I repeat that: offences against property fell by 6.5 per cent.

**Mr SEENEY:** Did the clear-up rates—

**Mr McGRADY:** There has been a small increase in the other major offence categories. Offences against the person increased by 0.7 per cent and other offences increased by 2.5 per cent. But there has been significant reductions recorded for the following specific offence categories: break and enters are down by 8.7 per cent, motor vehicle theft is down by 14.1 per cent, robbery has been reduced by 11.6 per cent and armed robbery is down by 18.9 per cent.

**Mr SEENEY:** What about the clear-up rate?

**Mr McGRADY:** They are examples of crime reduction strategies being adopted, I believe, by the Queensland Police Service. Anybody can do anything they like with statistics. People can get up on their soapboxes and give the impression that things are bad and that crime is increasing. But what we have to do is to consider just what is happening around the world and, indeed, what is happening around the Commonwealth. It gives none of us—certainly on this side of the table—any joy to see crime taking place. But the sad thing is that this is what is happening around the world and those figures which I have just given you now, I think, demonstrate some of the success stories of what the Queensland Police Service is doing. Later on, if I am asked questions, I can talk about some of the other progressive policies that the Queensland Police Service has introduced in recent times. Anybody anywhere can do what they like with figures and statistics, but I think that those figures that I have just outlined to you, Mr Chairman, and to your committee demonstrate that there has been some real improvement.

**Mr SEENEY:** What about the clear-up rates? Has there been an improvement in the clear-up rates? Do you have any targets for clear-up rates in property crime?

**Mr McGRADY:** I suppose the target that we have is a total clear-up rate, but the figures for percentage of offences cleared understates the clearance rate, because it does not take into account offences cleared to date. Rather, 'percentage cleared' refers to the percentage of offences that were reported—reported—within a specified period that were also cleared within that period. I think at this point I will ask the commissioner to say a few words on that.

**Comr ATKINSON:** This is an area we have given a major priority to, or since I became a commissioner we have given a major priority to. We have introduced a process called operational performance review. The number one priority for it is public safety—everything to do with people's safety—but the number two priority is related to their property and primarily their homes. As the minister indicated, even though the statistical year is not over yet and the final figures are not in, there is an approximately nine per cent decrease in reported crime for the break and enter of people's homes. The clear-up rate, I expect, will increase slightly. It is too early to call for sure, but it is trending upwards slightly—possibly by one or two per cent. But still, to my mind, that is a positive result.

I do not set specific targets in the operational performance review process but, broadly, what we encourage from the district officers—and the process focuses on the 29 districts throughout the state—is we would ask them to try to achieve a reduction in reported crime so that the number of offences occurring is reduced and there is an increase in the clear-up rate so that we get the trends going in the right direction in both ways. That is the primary goal in that regard.

Whilst these figures are only indicative figures for the first 11 months of the statistical year they are reliable, because as they are 11 months into a 12-month period, obviously, they can be relied on. But the final figures will not be available for another three months, I would say at least, until the statistical review is completed. One of the reasons for that is that with the clear-up rate particularly, an offence that occurs today might be cleared in a month or two months' time and it does take a little bit of time for the figures to settle to get the true picture. So until we get the statistical review documentation, which I think will probably be in three to four months' time from now perhaps—and it will be tabled in parliament, of course, with the police annual report—we will not know the final figures. But I feel very confident in saying at this stage that both are trending in the right direction—reported crime and clear-up rates.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for questions by non-government members has expired. I now call upon the member for Charters Towers.

**Mrs SMITH:** Minister, I refer you to page 1-22 of the MPS. Can you please detail for us the progress of the flying squad and what benefit this squad has been to the rural and regional areas of Queensland?

**Mr McGRADY:** I am delighted to accept that question because I want to say that the State Flying Squad commenced operations on 26 January this year, which is a significant date, and has

a current strength of seven officers. These officers are made up of one detective senior sergeant, two detective sergeants and four detective senior constables, and also some constables.

In this year's budget, the government reaffirmed its commitment to expanding this squad through the provision of an additional seven staff in the following year, and a further six staff will be allocated to the squad. The squad has a strong regional focus and provides local police with assistance in the investigation of serious crimes and matters of high public importance.

During the first four months the squad has been operational, it has been deployed on 18 occasions. Results achieved during these deployments include 112 offenders charged with 253 offences, 216 crime reports finalised, 198 investigation logs of four murders completed, 94 search warrants executed and \$392,000 worth of property recovered or, indeed, seized. I believe these results clearly demonstrate the State Flying Squad has proven to be an invaluable asset to the community and a more than handy resource to the Queensland Police Service.

The implementation of the State Flying Squad is further proof that our government is a government for all of Queensland and not just the south-east corner. Initiatives such as this will ensure that those in regional and, indeed, rural Queensland will continue to receive the highest possible level of service from the Police Service and that criminal investigations, no matter where they occur, will be conducted with the utmost professionalism and dedication.

This will be complemented by the net growth in police numbers by more than 300 officers each year. As I have said many times, this year we have 307 new police officers coming on board, as well as the creation of 16 regionally based tactical crime squads. All in all, I think it is a good record for the government and, indeed, the Police Service.

**Mrs SMITH:** I refer to dot point 2 on page 1-17 of the MPS. Can you detail how the implementation of the 16 tactical crime squads is progressing and how successful these squads have been in combating crime?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. The introduction of tactical crime squads is yet another example of the smart policing in the Smart State. As you would be well aware, before the last election the Beattie government committed to the introduction of 16 tactical crime squads with 14 officers in each. I am happy to report today that we are well on track to meeting this commitment with five tactical crime squads already in place and another six on their way this financial year.

These squads will target known crime hot spots within communities and focus on property and drug related crimes. They will also be available to target other criminal activity such as traffic and hooning offences, where and when required. Regions such as Logan, the Gold Coast, the city, the Fortitude Valley area, Cairns, Townsville and the Sunshine Coast are all currently benefiting from the Beattie government's initiative. In this financial year, \$1.5 million in funding has been provided to expand this initiative, with squads to be established in Ipswich, Toowoomba and South Brisbane, while the Logan and Gold Coast squads will be expanded to two 14-officer squads.

Since beginning operations, tactical crime squads throughout the state have charged or issued infringement notices for over 4,500 offences, including stealing, drugs, disorderly conduct, fraud and outstanding warrants. The ability of tactical crime squads to perform what is called 'saturation' patrolling of high crime areas allows it to promote high visibility and has an immediate effect on the level of crime in communities. This initiative is yet another example of smart policing in the Smart State. Our government is committed to the continued development of these highly successful tactical crime squads, with this support being backed by the appointment of an additional five in this current financial year.

**Mr ENGLISH:** On page 1-3 of the ministerial portfolio statement, paragraph 2, the international drug trade is highlighted as a significant concern for law enforcement. Can you please inform the committee what initiatives the state government proposes putting into place to address the illicit drug trade and the use of illicit drugs in the Torres Strait, and does the federal government have any responsibilities in relation to this matter?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for this very topical question. As you said, many areas of mutual concern for policing in Queensland are between the state and the Commonwealth. Areas of particular concern are remote zones like the Torres Strait, which present many challenges to the Police Service, as you would know.

A key problem in the Torres Strait is the flow of illicit drugs into the area from other countries such as Papua New Guinea. We believe the federal government has an avenue to assist us to

address the issue of illicit drug importation, which is a matter of border protection. Yesterday the Premier wrote to the Prime Minister to request that he make an aircraft available to assist authorities, including the Police Service, in cracking down on drug trafficking in the area. An aircraft would certainly assist authorities greatly by improving access to remote islands to locate those responsible for drug trafficking, and timely access to some of the more remote islands is critical to the success of any law enforcement related operation.

We will provide an increased police presence to enable a more comprehensive response to issues of mutual concern, including cross-border incursions, people smuggling, illegal importation of weapons, sly grogging—which is of vital concern—and flora and fauna offences. The Police Service will enhance the strength of the tactical crime squad which is currently based in Cairns. Fourteen positions have already been established and a further seven positions will be established during this financial year.

So it is not just a matter of us asking the federal government to come in and do the work. What we are saying is that we have announced yesterday that we will increase the tactical crime squad, which is currently based in Cairns, by a further seven officers and we are asking the Commonwealth to assist us with the provision of some sort of aircraft, whether it be a helicopter or some other plane, because, as I said, the responsibility for our borders rests with the Commonwealth. It is not a matter of confrontation; it is a matter of the two authorities working together to try to stop this drug trafficking in this important part of the state.

This all fits in with the government's plan for following Fitzgerald's report to the government on the problems and the solutions, if you like, to the problems in Cape York. I think this is part of our contribution to try and stop the importation of illicit drugs, and other things too, into that vast area which some of us know so well.

**The CHAIR:** I refer to the government's commitment to increase police numbers to reach the target of 9,100 by the year 2005, as mentioned on page 1-4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Could you please inform the committee of the progress that is being made in regional Queensland by the Beattie government in its bid to reach this target?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Chairman, you obviously save the best questions for yourself because I think this is a very, very important question. I can advise without a doubt that our government remains on target to reach 9,100 serving police officers by the year 2005. That is a commitment we made at the last election. We said we would increase police numbers by 300 each year until the year 2005. We are bang on target for this. In fact, as I said before, this year we will be employing 307. But to meet growth and attrition, approximately 600 recruits are being trained each year. When people say that these 300 are simply replacing some who are leaving or retiring for various reasons, I am saying that we are talking about a net increase of 300 police officers a year.

As I just mentioned, the academies are training 600 to meet these requirements. These 600 recruits are being trained and will provide the Police Service with, as I keep on saying, a net increase of more than 300 officers each year. This growth in police numbers has been experienced in all police regions right across the state. In fact, I am pleased to report that, since 1998 when our government first took power, the following increases in police numbers have been achieved: in the far northern region, the actual strength of sworn police grew from 467 officers as of 1 July 1998 to 557 as of 17 June this year; the northern region has increased from 477 officers to about, as I said, 556; the central region has grown from an actual strength of 562 officers in July to 631 as of June 2002; actual police strength in the north coast region was 805 in July 1998 and as at 17 June 2002 it was 996—that is a 23.7 per cent increase; the southern region had an actual strength of 643, today it is 771—again, that is almost a 20 per cent increase; the south-eastern region's actual police strength was 898, it is now 1,021; metro north had an actual sworn strength of 886, today it is 1,042; and, finally, metro south had an actual sworn strength of 744, today it is 886. So, right across the state we have seen increases in police numbers.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Page 2-1 of the MPS refers to the Prostitution Licensing Authority's contribution to the government's aim to create safer and more supportive communities where all Queenslanders are safe and respected and where workplace health and safety for all sex workers is a high priority. Could the minister expand on how the government is standing by its safer and more supportive communities platform with respect to prostitution legislation?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question, because it allows me the opportunity to reiterate that the government has no current intentions to make further amendments to the prostitution legislation. That is not to say that from time to time there could be some slight

changes, but certainly the philosophy contained in the original legislation is there and I have no proposals to make any major changes. The intention of the prostitution legislation passed by the parliament in 1999 was to ensure the health and safety of sex workers—and of course their clients—by bringing this activity out into the public area. The ability for organised crime to infiltrate this industry will obviously be diminished. Prostitution exists and it always will exist. Ignoring this fact would not only be naive but certainly irresponsible.

I am sure the member would be aware from annual reports from last year that the Prostitution Advisory Council and the Prostitution Licensing Authority certainly wanted us as a government to relax the original conditions of our legislation. It wanted more sex workers to work in the brothels and it wanted to allow brothels to act like escort agencies—and they have their reasons for that. I think on an issue such as this it is important that governments listen to all sides of the discussion. We have made it perfectly clear that we are not going down this track. The government has a responsibility to ensure that huge sprawling brothel facilities do not emerge within towns or indeed suburbs to the detriment of nearby inhabitants. There will be no amendments to prostitution legislation that will compromise the strict regulation of this industry and thereby the safety of the community. In fact, the member would have seen in the local papers people complaining that the regulations are too tough. To repeat what has previously been said by the Premier, there will be no Kings Crosses or St Kilda Roads here. We have the toughest prostitution laws in Australia, and there is no way we will change them. Of course, any other matters that do arise will most appropriately be subject to consideration by the Crime and Misconduct Commission when carrying out the statutory review of the Prostitution Act three years from the date of its commencement. There will be teething problems. In fact, members would be aware that earlier this year we made two major changes to the Prostitution Act. That was debated in the parliament and we received the support of the parliament. I want to assure the committee today that I have no intention of bringing any major changes to the original legislation.

**Mrs SMITH:** I refer to page 1-8 of the MPS and to police beats. Will the minister provide details of the police beats and police beat shopfronts that are to be provided in the 2002-03 budget? Will there be any additional beats above and beyond the government's election commitments?

**Mr McGRADY:** When one has been a minister as long as I have there are certain situations which one gets a great deal of pleasure from. In my old portfolio it could have been opening power stations, but in this portfolio I get no greater joy than from opening police beats, because the people absolutely love them. As the member is no doubt aware, the Community Renewal Program was and is an initiative of the Beattie government. The whole purpose of the program is to build stronger and safer communities by addressing locally identified needs. We do intend to build more police beats and shopfronts. One of the greatest problems I have is trying to meet the demand from local members, who all want them. As the members of the opposition will know, we only have so much in the bin, but this year we were able to build more than we originally budgeted for. These beats will in fact be built in a number of places. Police beat shopfronts will be built at Coolangatta, Springfield and the Milton-Paddington area close to the city. There will be a number of shopfronts as well. During this term they will be at the Willows Shopping Centre in Townsville, K mart at Cannon Hill and at the Morayfield Shopping Centre. In fact, just a few weeks ago a number of people from Bribie Island came across—former Mount Isans—to see what a great idea it was. We opened facilities at Holloways Beach in Cairns, Oxley, Tullawong, Rochedale, South Goodna, North Ipswich and Marsden-Crestmead. These are all the things that we are doing. I am sure the commissioner would like to reiterate some of the points I have made about police beats.

**Comr ATKINSON:** Firstly, the shopfronts are particularly important because, either regrettably or inevitably, major shopping centres seem to have taken over as centres of community focus and interest with people gathering together. In that sense, the shopfronts have been extremely successful. They provide a police presence where in many cases thousands of people gather on a daily basis. There is clear evidence that they both have reduced the actual rate of crime and the fear of crime. The beats have been also particularly successful in my view because it is not possible to provide a police station in every community, but there are some. Holloways Beach is a good example, on the northern beaches of Cairns, where it is a unique, isolated, separate community. Even though it is in the Smithfield division, it has its own policing presence.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** That is the end of the time allocated for questions from government members. I now call the member for Lockyer.



**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, I refer you to my question on notice No. 7 and your answer thereto. I just want to pick your mind a little further on this. I asked—

How many positions of officers in charge of stations, establishments or sections are presently filled on an acting basis?

You replied that there were around 84 and gave a number of reasons why these officers would be on such temporary duties. I would hazard a guess that sometimes that figure could be a great deal higher than 84. Bearing in mind the need for stability even at a local level in decision making and policy implementation, would you not consider that 84 or even more officers temporarily in charge of stations is unacceptable? Could you also add how many officers fill the position of OC and what percentage is represented by the 84?

**Mr McGRADY:** The information I have is that, out of the 700, 84 are relieving. This is an issue, and it is an issue that I am concerned about and no doubt the commissioner is. As it is based on an operational matter, I would be more than happy to ask the commissioner to answer your question.

**Comr ATKINSON:** There are approximately 400 establishments statewide and approximately 700 officer in charge positions. Of course, as you well know, in larger stations there will be a number of officers in charge apart from the officer in charge of the station. There is the officer in charge of the CI branch, the Juvenile Aid Bureau, the prosecution section and the Scenes of Crime Unit. So there would be a number of officers in charge. I think the balance is quite sound at the moment. It is true, though, that to develop senior sergeants who are potentially going to become inspectors we have at times, and we do at times, put those officers into an officer in charge position if it is considered that they need that in terms of their development. However, with 700 officer in charge positions it will be inevitable that not all of those positions will be filled at any one time. It also presents an opportunity for other officers who have career aspirations—and I think that is a healthy thing—to gain experience in terms of relieving in an officer in charge role. It is certainly a very important role and I would not want my comments in any way to have you think that we underestimate or devalue in any sense our view of the importance of the role. In fact, the opposite is the reality.

The operational performance review that I mentioned a moment ago in responding to a question from Mr Seeney in terms of crime figures is something that we have introduced in the service. It places a very strong emphasis on the value and performance of a district and also the district officer. Parallel to that is the performance of officers in charge, particularly officers in charge of stations. As the commissioner, I strongly value the work of officers in charge and under no circumstances during my term as commissioner will I allow that to be diminished in any way. I think it is going to be inevitable that, with the number of establishments we have throughout the state—approximately 700—that have officers in charge there will be periods when the dedicated appointed officer in charge will not be available for a whole range of reasons.

**Mr FLYNN:** I refer you to my question on notice No. 8 and your answer. I asked in several parts about statewide activity surveys simply as a means of getting to times that officers perform administrative duties. Even with the advent of computers we seem to spend more and more time on administrative functions. Whilst computers are fast, they create avenues for further work. Part of your answer stated that the survey does not differentiate between police officers and staff members. I realise that I have been away from the field for about 16 months, but my recollection is that the form included references to sworn members, how long, how old, sex, and what duties they were performing. Is this form, as it is currently, producing the results that the service wants in order to attract further funding?

**Mr McGRADY:** Likewise, that is basically an operational matter so I will ask the commissioner to comment on it.

**Comr ATKINSON:** Certainly, your observations in relation to that we take on board. Obviously, I cannot give you a response to that at the moment. I am satisfied that the surveys do provide us with a sound response in terms of where the percentage of time spent on administrative duties is falling. To some extent, there is a degree of meshing in some cases of the work of our civilian staff members and police officers. Broadly, they are all about the same goals.

I take your point that there is a degree of administrative workload, but I cannot see that that will ever go away. You would be well aware that the situation post Fitzgerald is that accountability in a police department is important. The price of that, inevitably, is a regime of systems that enable us to provide and be aware of information. I feel that the systems we have in place currently provide a reasonable balance in terms of the time spent on administrative duties and

also the necessity for a large police department, which we are, to be accountable, to be transparent, and to be open and for its operations and activities to be examined. I probably cannot add a great deal to that response, unless there was some further specific issue that you wanted to ask about.

**Mr FLYNN:** That is fine. Due to time constraints, I would like to take up with your department at a later stage the further concerns that I have. Minister, in my question on notice No. 9 I spoke about the importance of training in computer technology. In reply, you gave me a fairly comprehensive breakdown of training. I am concerned not so much about the number of hours but about the number of officers formally trained. My experience was that, particularly in regional and rural Queensland, officers are very much self-trained by way of computer based training and perhaps there is a local training officer who can give them one or two moments. But block training, which used to be extraordinarily valuable, is available only to officers in major cities.

**Mr McGRADY:** Again, these are basically operational matters and I am more than happy for the commissioner to take that one, too.

**Comr ATKINSON:** I think on balance the computer based training is probably the way of the future. There will always be a need for officers—in terms of the block training that you describe—to take part in face-to-face training sessions with instructors. Clearly, we do that. But equally, we have to consider the remoteness of Queensland, the decentralised nature of the state and the fact that we have some 400 establishments statewide. The block training currently, I understand, is 42 hours for each sworn officer annually, which is quite a reasonable figure. That coupled with the capacity for officers to undertake computer based training is quite a solid platform for them. Additionally, as you are aware, the service encourages participation in the constables development program and the management development program as well. When you allow for those things—the amount of block training we do and the access to computer based training—we are in pretty solid shape in terms of our training regime at present.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, perforce of my previous life most of my questions are operational. Minister, domestic violence—and I used to be a domestic violence liaison officer—is one of the most important duties carried out by the Police Service today. It is so intertwined with a whole range of particularly serious offences. I take on board the commissioner's remarks about block training. Domestic violence training takes place in stations by and large. Computer based training—CBT—is all very well, but you just push buttons and you cannot ask a computer to explain anything. Particularly in areas of deep significance such as domestic violence it would be important for it to be delivered first-hand. Can the commissioner perhaps indicate whether that might be the case?

**Comr ATKINSON:** It is a significant area indeed, not just because of the serious nature of domestic violence but obviously from a police officer's perspective there is a very high risk at times associated with attending domestic violence incidents. As you are aware, the legislation was expanded from the original legislation to its current stage. It is the intention of parliament that the legislation will expand further.

We intend to put into place a comprehensive training regime to enable our officers to be conversant with the expanded legislation when it does come into place, and I understand that that will occur. Again, I do not want to sound repetitive here, but a focus of the operational performance review process has in fact been domestic violence. It has focused on training. It is my understanding that the operational performance review process is a district focus. It focuses on their being domestic violence liaison officers so there is a single point of contact for officers in the district of someone who has the necessary level of expertise and knowledge. We have a statewide domestic violence coordinator who is contactable also.

I think the nature of policing today and the pace of change with policies, procedures and legislation is such that it is probably impossible in my view for any single police officer to be fully conversant with the whole range of issues that exist. So domestic violence liaison officers in the district are a focal point. The operational performance review process is looking particularly at the number of calls to domestic violence incidents; the number of those that result in orders being taken out; the number of calls of a repeat nature, because that is of great concern to us in terms of our police officers being called back over and over and over again to the same house for a domestic violence issue; and the numbers of breaches of orders. The other area where we are focusing on is the relationship between the police in the particular community and the other domestic violence liaison services.

We have still got a long way to go with this. There is a lot that we still do not know. In some places, for example, what we are finding is that the local domestic violence services are taking out more applications in the courts than the police are and in other places it is the other way around. In no case though is that seen to be unhealthy. So it is probably a set of circumstances that relate to the particular community and how people in that community want to address the court process. We are progressing it. I think we are in good shape. I think that the concept of domestic violence liaison officers is the way forward with this—that is, to have one person in the district who has the expertise for everyone else to tap into.

**Mr FLYNN:** Thank you, Commissioner. My final question is of a policy-driven nature, so we are on the home run here. I refer to speed cameras and the public perception—and I know how strongly you feel about this perception—that they are considered by many members of the public to be revenue raisers. In your answer to my question on notice No. 10 you gave me your opinion of the results of experiments in New South Wales. But in South Australia they are actually putting signs out saying that 200 yards ahead there is a speed camera. They are basically saying, 'This is an absolute black spot. You speed and you will be detected.' I am informed that that state's accident rate involving serious injury and death is plummeting. It has been said that if you tell members of the public exactly where the camera is they are only going to slow down there and then speed up. They would have done that anyway. I would suggest that if you have identified an accident black spot surely saying, 'This is where the camera is,' will stop speeding at those points where there have been severe accidents and you could still have random sites elsewhere. That would do away with the public perception of revenue raising and also kill off accidents at black spots. Can you comment on that?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for his observations. I think most people have a view on speed cameras. You kept on using the word 'perceptions', and you are right. There is a perception out there that speed cameras are simply revenue raising. The revenue that is raised of course goes back into providing educational and other programs to try to educate the people about the dangers of speed. Different states do it in different ways. I have recently set up a—I hate using the words 'task force' or 'group'—committee. The Minister for Transport and I and all ministers have what we call a caucus committee involving six or seven members, but mine is so popular that it consists of about 10. I like to think it is because of my charms, but obviously it is something else.

We have got a number of people from both committees to work together to examine what is happening in other states, particularly New South Wales. We have approximately six backbenchers who are currently looking at what is happening around the other states. One of my ministerial staff is the research officer and the member for Springwood is the chair of this combined group. What we are hoping to achieve is some idea of some of the initiatives such as the ones that you have outlined today and what happens in the various states.

**Mr FLYNN:** Have you considered that yet?

**Mr McGRADY:** The committee is. This committee has recently been set up under the chairmanship of the member for Springwood, as I mentioned before. I hope that the members of that committee can go to New South Wales and the other states out of session to find out what exactly is happening. They will come back to me and the Minister for Transport with a certain number of recommendations and then we as the ministers will go to the Department of Transport and the Queensland Police Service to see if we can come up with something which takes into account the real concerns which you have just raised. I just want to stress today that this perception out there that simply every time you get a speeding ticket the money goes into the pocket of the government or into the pocket of the Police Department is not true. All the moneys raised there are used to promote road safety and other issues as well.

**The CHAIR:** The time for non-government questions has expired.

**Mr ENGLISH:** At the top of page 1-11 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements there is a reference to a school based policing conference. Minister, can you outline what contribution school based policing makes to both policing and education in Queensland? Are there any new initiatives for school based policing proposed for the 2002-03 financial year?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question, because this is another one of those proposals, if you like, which I think need more consideration. We have a number of school based policing programs around the state. In fairness to the former government, it introduced them. So top marks to it. There has been a lull in expanding them, but I have been having discussions with the commissioner and some of his senior officers with a view to trying to increase them. In fact,

the member for Charters Towers is one member who has been agitating, if you like, for an increase in the application of this policy. As you know, when the member for Charters Towers comes along with an idea, unless you do something about it you are in big strife.

Mr Warry, the commissioner and a few others have been looking into the possibility of being able to expand this program, and there is a cost involved. No matter what you do, there is a cost involved. It is additional police officers. But the idea of it is that the police officer becomes part of that school community. This is all about the police officer being seen and becoming known to the students. It is also part of that philosophy about community policing which I think is just so important. The police can do so much, but we need the help and cooperation of the public. This is just one other area where the police officer can be seen to be part of the school community. The young people do not see him or her as the enemy. I think there is merit in it. We are looking at the costs now, but I am certainly hoping that we will be able to increase and improve the number of school based police officers that we currently have around the state.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I want to ask you a question about the Australian Crime Commission. I refer to page 1-3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, which discusses the challenges that lay ahead for the Police Service and refers to the issue of trans-national crime. In light of this, what additional policing costs are likely to be incurred by the Queensland government as a result of the Commonwealth government's response to trans-national crime, particularly in relation to the replacement of the National Crime Authority with the Australian Crime Commission?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for the question because it is a timely one. There have been some significant developments with respect to the formation of the ACC in the last 24 hours or so. As members may know, on 27 May this year the Premier endorsed the Commonwealth's blueprint for the Australian Crime Commission. However, it is with a great deal of regret that I advise members today that the progression of the new Australian Crime Commission has been placed in jeopardy because the Commonwealth government has revealed this week that it has begun developing an independent blueprint for the formation of the new body.

I have called on the Commonwealth to honour the new agreement reached during the leaders summit on terrorism and trans-national crime, which recognised the importance of effective cooperation between the jurisdictions and decided that details on the ACC would be settled by mutual agreement. Instead, it would appear the Commonwealth is preoccupied, undermining the spirit of the original agreement. I was advised on Monday night that the Commonwealth, at the last stage, is developing an independent position on the formation of the ACC for consideration by police ministers when we meet next week in Darwin. This is despite the fact that Commonwealth, state and territory officials have developed an agreed blueprint on the ACC which, until Monday of this week, was in its final stages of approval by states and, indeed, the territories.

The Commonwealth seems to be winding back the original agreement. It once again wants to impose a weakened national crime-fighting body that gathers intelligence while severely restricting any investigative capacity. It is vital that the new ACC has an investigative capacity. Police have made it clear that the two functions are fundamentally linked and a restriction of the investigation function will significantly undermine the fight against organised crime. I remain concerned that the Commonwealth will not maintain the funding levels previously allocated to the National Crime Authority and associated intelligence bodies. They have not made any commitment to funding but have shifted the cost of funding police secondees on ACC task forces to the states and territories. This will cost Queensland \$1.4 million a year.

The Commonwealth also has not undertaken to maintain a national crime-fighting capability in regional offices, including Queensland and Western Australia. I call on the leaders of the Queensland Liberals and the Queensland Nationals to stand up for Queensland and approach their colleagues in Canberra with a view to ensuring that we are not disadvantaged by any funding cuts as a result of the formation of the ACC. At this stage I will be working with my interstate colleagues to ensure that the ACC blueprint developed by the Commonwealth, the states and the territories is the one to be considered by police ministers when we meet in Darwin next week. The Commonwealth has clearly breached its original undertaking at the leaders summit, and unless a cooperative approach is adopted as per the original agreement the progression of the new ACC will be severely hampered.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** I refer to page 1-26 of the MPS . There are three dot points on that page where the staging of CHOGM is discussed. Can the minister detail the costs incurred by the Queensland Police Service in staging CHOGM? How much of this cost will be recoverable from the Commonwealth government? Furthermore, in what ways did police benefit from this event?

**Mr McGRADY:** The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in March of this year was a tremendous success and certainly highlighted Queensland's ability to hold world-class events in a safe and secure environment. Approximately 4,000 Queensland police, or just over half the Police Service, worked at the Sunshine Coast with federal authorities during CHOGM to meet an immense security commitment of an event of that magnitude. During CHOGM the Police Service provided security to a total of 21 venues, including the six main venues, such as the Hyatt Regency Coolum, the Novotel Twin Waters resort, Brisbane airport and, indeed, the Sunshine Coast airport.

To facilitate such an immense security operation the Police Service was allocated a grant of just over \$20 million from the Premier's Department. This is compared to a total cost incurred by the Police Service of an estimated \$20.9 million. As part of these costs the Police Service benefited through the purchase of a large array of equipment, which included communications equipment consisting of 1,000 hand-held radios at a cost of \$3,000 each—which as you know would amount to some \$3 million—night vision goggles and other perimeter security devices valued at approximately half a million dollars.

In addition to this equipment the Queensland Police Service benefited from an extensive training program undertaken in preparation for CHOGM, and this has allowed members of the Queensland Police Service access to extensive training at no cost to the taxpayers of this state. It is expected that by the end of this month the exact cost of CHOGM will be finalised. The Beattie government was given an ironclad guarantee from the federal government that the cost will be met in full by it, and we expect it to uphold that promise.

What this all adds up to is that Queensland successfully held a world-class event that showcased Queensland to the world. Police benefited through additional equipment and extensive additional training. It also proved to the world that we are capable of holding such significant world events. I think the success of CHOGM 2002 is a credit to all the agencies involved in the preparation of the event.

Prior to coming in here today I heard the previous minister, and he on behalf of his department was taking credit for the success—and rightly so, too. But I have to say that my view is that the Queensland Police Service really did stand out. Top marks to all those people who participated in CHOGM, but I believe that the police did a fine job.

**Mrs SMITH:** On page 1-3 of the MPS there is a reference to the traditional role of police in reducing the availability of drugs. Can you please expand on what contribution the Police Service has made in respect of reducing the availability of drugs in Queensland?

**Mr McGRADY:** The policing of drugs is the responsibility of both regional police and the State Drug Investigation Group. The State Drug Investigation Group consists of a total of 68 staff comprising one detective superintendent in charge, 60 police officers and seven civilian employees, including two investigative accountants. Whilst its major focus is on investigating major and organised drug-related offences that cross regional, interstate and international boundaries, it also provides assistance to regional police. By way of example, it is currently involved in a number of overt and covert operations throughout the state. In the last financial year the squad was involved in 31 covert operations and 29 overt operations that have resulted in the arrest of 504 people on 879 drug and other criminal charges. This is a significant effort, and I congratulate the service on this outcome.

It would be foolish to suggest that the State Drug Investigation Group is the only tool being used in the fight against drugs. The state government is committed to addressing the complex issues surrounding illicit drug use. This is marked by other initiatives, including the tactical crime squads, the State Flying Squad, more sniffer dogs, the increasing use of drug-detecting scanners and more illicit market scanners. In addition, we have progressed initiatives such as the drug court trials and the drug diversion program to help people out of drug use and out of crime.

It should also be remembered that all operational police assist in policing drug offences—from traffic officers to the Juvenile Aid Bureau officers. The government is further committed to fighting drug-related crime by increasing police numbers. A major initiative being progressed in this current financial year is the creation of the 307 additional police positions which I mentioned before. The government plans to stand by its election commitment to increase police numbers by the 300, to which I keep referring—and I will until the year 2007—and as I said, come 2007 we will be in a position then to revisit the situation to see whether or not we need maybe fewer operational police and more civilians. But again, that is in the future. Meanwhile my

commitment and the commitment of this government is that we will be increasing the Queensland Police Service by 300 operational police officers every year.

**Mr ENGLISH:** In answer to a question by the member for Burleigh you mentioned the government's drug diversion program. The aim of this program is to reduce the number of offenders appearing before the courts for minor drug offences. Could you please outline exactly how effective this program has been?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. Harmful drug use disrupts the lives of drug users. It disrupts the life of their families, their friends and their communities through illness and disease, injury, workplace difficulties, violence, crime and the effects on relationships. The whole community bears the human and the health costs associated with drug abuse. With this in mind, the state government has progressed a number of proactive initiatives aimed at helping drug users, particularly young drug users, before they become trapped in a life of drugs that automatically leads to a life of crime.

In the last financial year the cannabis drug diversion program has helped 5,500 people into preliminary rehabilitation treatment. Of these, about 80 per cent attended a drug diversion assessment program. About 33 per cent of diversions were for people under the age of 20, with a further 28 per cent being for those between the ages of 20 and 25. This program is a key element in the bid to allow minor, first-time drug users a chance to avoid the cycle of drug dependency which inevitably leads to crime. Drugs are a problem that the government is determined to tackle head on, but a balanced approach is required—combining enforcement with rehabilitation and education to encourage people away from the use of these evil things. Diversion programs are not all about discrimination or legalisation of illicit drugs but are an early intervention strategy to allow people apprehended for minor drug offences to change and to receive professional help, rather than simply proceed through the criminal justice system. Diversion provides offenders with an opportunity to address their drug use early and in many cases before they get a criminal record.

When one understands and appreciates that between 75 per cent and 80 per cent of people in the Queensland prison system are there because of drug related crimes, one understands how big the problem is. Wherever I go, particularly when I am addressing young people, particularly at high school graduation nights, I always say, 'Those of you who may think drugs are cool are fooling yourselves because the figure of 75 per cent to 80 per cent should be a lessen to you all.' Those people who talk about drugs being cool or who say, 'Just try it; it is not addictive,' are fooling themselves. The other night the commissioner and I had the opportunity to address the Nambour Chamber of Commerce. Most of the questions we received were along the same lines as those we are being asked here tonight. Obviously whoever selected the questions is pretty much on the ball.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of the Police Service has expired. I thank everyone for their attendance.

**Mr McGRADY:** I have here an answer to a question asked earlier by the member for Callide. I table the answer.

Sitting suspended from 5.38 p.m. to 5.47 p.m..

**The CHAIR:** The committee will now consider the estimates of the Department of Corrective Services.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, in reply to my question on notice No. 3 regarding Corrective Services reviews you stated that internal review procedures relating to open custody have significantly reduced the number of escapes from these open security centres. Up to and including 16 May 2002, there had been 13 escapes from open custody in the last financial year. I take that figure from a reply you gave me to a question asked in parliament, No. 649. Given that your department has now failed in achieving its target for prisoners in open custody in two consecutive financial years, do you still consider that review to have been a success?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. It gives me the opportunity to discuss the situation across all types of prisons. I think the first thing we should establish is that over the past three years there has been not one single escape from a secure prison. Let us establish that from the beginning.

**Mr SEENEY:** I never disputed that. The question was about open custody.

**Mr McGRADY:** There has been not one single escape from a secure prison. All successful escapes have occurred from open security facilities at which prisoners have been under escort. In

the last financial year 13 prisoners have escaped from open custody centres. Seven of these escapes were from the open custody at Palen Creek, three were from the Capricornia correctional centre farm near Rockhampton and three were from Numinbah in the Gold Coast hinterland. Eight of these escaped prisoners were recaptured within two days of escape. Four of the escapees were recaptured shortly after, with only one remaining at large. One offender subject to a parole order escaped while being escorted from the Rockhampton Community Corrections office. One additional escape attempt of a prisoner on escort to the Princess Alexandra secure unit was stopped by quick action of the escorting officers.

What I am saying is that when you are dealing with people who have been before the courts, who have been sentenced and who are then out in the various open-type prisons, whilst it is sad and whilst it is disappointing—whilst it causes major concern to me and senior members of the service and whilst I do not accept it—the facts are that people from time to time move out. The important point to remember is that from the secure prison system we have had not one single escape.

I do not think it is a point that we should start playing politics with, because if I wanted to I could give figures that would suggest that under a previous regime prisoner numbers were up and down like yo-yos. I will not get into that nonsense. What I am saying now is that when I first became the minister I set up this group which made a number of recommendations which have in the main been implemented. I am more than happy for the shadow minister to come any time at all. I am more than happy to give him a brief on what we are doing and some of the changes we have made. At the end of the day, our job is to keep those people inside. I think we have been relatively successful.

**Mr SEENEY:** Just out of interest, how many of these prisoners remain unaccounted for?

**Mr McGRADY:** One. Robert Blewonski. He escaped from Palen Creek on 7 October. For all we know he could be overseas. He could be dead. We do not know.

**Mr SEENEY:** In March 2002 your government announced that it would begin a three-month study into the use of drug-free units within Queensland correctional centres. Why is it that your department sees a need for drug-free units inside Queensland correctional centres, given that most people would suggest that prisons themselves should be drug free?

**Mr McGRADY:** Point taken. As you would know, and as I mentioned previously, drug use is the single largest factor impacting on the lives of offenders. Studies show a strong correlation between drug use, criminal activity and re-offending. We are not only concerned with cracking down on illicit drugs in prisons; we are concerned to provide comprehensive rehabilitation programs aimed at trying to limit the demand for drugs amongst the prison population in the first place. Mr Chairman, you would recall that not too long after I became the minister I introduced a number of initiatives to try to prevent drugs getting in. I got a lot of criticism from many quarters when I introduced strip searching. I was criticised—

**Mr SEENEY:** Not from me you were not. I just want to make the point.

**Mr McGRADY:** I never suggested that, but it is an issue that I have to say that I do not apologise to anyone for.

**Mr SEENEY:** No, and it is an issue that I support. I just wanted that on the record.

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes. We had a situation where drugs were getting into the prisons in many, many ways and some of the people who you are dealing with, shall I say, would not be candidates for the executive positions of the CWA. Some of these people are past masters at crime activity. So you run the risk of these people bringing this stuff inside the prison. When you see some of the items that get inside the prisons, you just wonder how in heavens name they get there.

Coming back to strip searching, it was not an easy decision for me to make, because it is not the most pleasant of activity to be involved in, particularly for women. But I took the decision that if we are to stop getting drugs in prison—not just for the benefit of the inmates but also for the staff—we have to take some action. So we have the strip searching that takes place. We have the machines at the door. We have 1,001 different ways of stopping drugs getting in. But at the end of the day, the drugs are still getting into the system.

There is a range of addiction based programs that are provided throughout all of our facilities. There are some schemes that people, whom the authorities are trying to get off the drugs, have to offer supplements to. It is one of the major issues facing the authorities, it is one of

the major issues facing our portfolio, but it is one that we are spending so much time in just trying to come up with ways and means of preventing this stuff getting into the prison system.

**Mr SEENEY:** Can you provide an update of the three-month study? Do you have any indication about what the net cost of providing these drug-free units will be?

**Ms RINGROSE:** We have just commenced with the drug free units. We have just commenced the study in one of our correctional centres. It is a residential area that would normally house prisoners, anyway, and the programs that they receive are the same as other prisoners within the prison receive. The only difference is that they are a group of prisoners who have declared that they wish to be drug free and they want the support of other prisoners who also want to follow that type of program. With respect to cost, there is not really any significant cost in providing that unit, because we would normally be providing accommodation for those prisoners, anyway.

**Mr SEENEY:** Fair enough. I refer you to page 3 of the MPS and the trial of electronic monitoring coupled with home detention that has taken place over the 2001-02 budget period. During these estimates hearings last year, the acting director-general referred to the fact that your department did not have a budget other than what had already been granted by Treasury to trial more than 50 offenders when the trial was fully operational. Can you give us an update on the situation with electronic monitoring? How many offenders have participated in the trial to date? Can you provide a breakdown of the total cost equipment and the cost to the department of monitoring the trial?

**Mr McGRADY:** Funding of \$600,000 last year and \$700,000 was provided for the trial. It is anticipated that the total expenditure for the trial up until June just gone will be \$856,000. The trial is due for completion in December this year. So the total budget for this year alone—this financial year—is anticipated to be approximately \$480,000.

I pay due regard to your interest in electronic monitoring, because you have raised the question a number of times in the parliament. But as a government, as a department, we are trialling electronic monitoring to improve the supervision of offenders and to assess the potential for the broader usage of this electronic monitoring for offenders in the community. This electronic monitoring is used with home detention orders to obviously strengthen the effectiveness of community corrections supervision. The program enables the offender to maintain employment, to reintegrate with their family, to participate in rehabilitation programs and indeed in services within their local community. It also provides a positive benefit to the community and also to the offenders and their families.

As you probably know, the offenders wear an anklet 24 hours a day to monitor their movements and to ensure compliance with the provisions of their home detention orders. The technology provides increased surveillance of the offenders and allows the department to implement a quick response when an unauthorised absence is identified. It has been found that electronic monitoring interrupts the pattern of offending and removes the offender from the circumstances of his or her offending.

The trial, which originally was to run for 18 months, has been extended for a further six months—to, as I said before, December this year. The final evaluation report will be completed in January, I have to say, by an external evaluator. Community corrections boards determine whether or not an offender is suitable for release and to be under the protection of the electronic monitoring. Release for offenders with sexual or violent offences on home detention with this form of device is available only where the community corrections board has first assessed them as suitable for release. The board may then, if they so desire, choose to add the additional protection of the electronic monitoring to enhance their safety. So it is going well. I think that it is going to be one of those usages that we are going to see more and more in the future.

**Mr SEENEY:** I might have missed it, but how much money is in the budget this year for the electronic monitoring?

**Mr McGRADY:** I did mention that to you. It is \$480,000.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is enough money to extend the trial until December; is that correct?

**Mr McGRADY:** We believe so. The evaluation, as I said, takes place in January and then we just work out how much further we intend to go.

**Mr SEENEY:** So there is no money in the budget to implement electronic monitoring past the end of the trial, which will finish in December?



**Mr McGRADY:** The trial finishes at the end of December. The evaluation will start in January. So by the time we get the evaluation, we work on what the costs are going to be, what the benefits are going to be. As I said a moment ago, I see this as the way to go in the future. There is a cost involved, but I think that as a department we will simply find the money.

**Mr SEENEY:** By your own admission, the trial seems to have been a success.

**Mr McGRADY:** To date.

**Mr SEENEY:** Is there an explanation for the apparent reluctance to adopt this technology on a much wider scale than the very limited trial that has been in place up until now? Could it not be argued that the extension of the trial for that six months is simply a delaying mechanism against the financial impost of implementing electronic monitoring on a much wider scale?

**Mr McGRADY:** No, there is no reluctance, but like many things, before you rush into something you have these trials. There is nothing at all wrong with extending the trial. As I said to you and as I have said to the committee, I believe that this is the way that we will be going in the future. But before you rush in and do these things—something new—you have this trial, you evaluate the results of the trial, you find out the pluses, you find out the negatives, and then you work out the policies as to how you are going to implement it. I will be seeking the views of the parole boards, which in my opinion play an important role. I will be talking to a number of other people and then a policy decision will be made and then we find the money.

There are lots of things that I would love to do, both in the Police Service and in Corrective Services. At the end of the day, there is just so much money in the bin. We do not have a money tree in some of the prison farms. I would like to have one, but we do not. So any moneys at all that we get comes from the taxpayers. This is something that I have a great deal of faith in, but before we go down this path, I want to see this trial evaluated, I want to see what the costs are, and we take the decisions then. As I said to you before, I compliment you on your concern and what appears to be your support for this project. Rest assured that, providing the evaluation is positive, I believe we will go down this path. That being the case, we will get the money. We will find the money.

**Mr SEENEY:** So, if the trial was not extended as a means of delaying the commitment to the full-scale implementation of this technology, why was it felt necessary to extend the trial?

**Mr McGRADY:** Can we just get it straight: there is no delaying tactic. This is something relatively new; it is something obviously modern. It appears to be the way to go but, again, you are going into a whole new field, a whole new area and before we go down this path I think it is only wise and sensible to have this trial. I mean we have trials on many things.

**Mr SEENEY:** But why was it necessary to extend it, that was the question?

**Mr McGRADY:** We just felt that the information we had to date was not a hundred per cent and that we just needed this time.

**Mr SEENEY:** Were there any major failures in the initial part of the trial?

**Mr McGRADY:** I do not believe there were any major failings. Again, I just think we needed this additional time, and I make no apologies at all. There was a low number of sexual and violent offenders who were on this trial and we just wanted to try to increase those numbers and see if we could get more information. But there is no delay. There is no reluctance by either the department or the government, or a wish to delay this. But before we go down this path, it is going to cost money and I just want to make sure that we are 100 per cent certain that it is going to do what we want it to do. Once we get this evaluation, we will go down that path.

**Mr SEENEY:** So, what additional information do you hope to get from the extension of the trial that was not available from the initial trial of this technology? What additional data are you after?

**Mr McGRADY:** We just want more data. We want to see more people go through this system, we want to see the pros and the cons and at the end of the day we will make that decision.

**Mr SEENEY:** Do you have an anticipated cost for the full implementation of this technology?

**Mr SEVERIN:** The anticipated costs are similar to the costs that were used for the trial, except the project component of that. What is important to recognise is that it is really the cost of not having to manage these offenders in custody. The estimate there is that it saves about \$65 per offender per day by moving offenders from custody to the electronic monitoring home detention supervision.

**Mr SEENEY:** But there would be a need for a capital injection up front to implement this technology on a widespread basis and that is what I am suggesting to you is being delayed by increasing the time of the trial.

**Mr McGRADY:** With due respect, I mentioned a moment ago that the numbers were low and so we increased the type of offenders who went on the trial.

**Mr SEENEY:** But you did not change the technology?

**Mr McGRADY:** The point is, as I said before, there are lots of things that I would like to do in both sides of my portfolio, but there is a cost involved. There is a cost involved.

**Mr SEENEY:** So it was the cost that was the reason for extending the trial?

**Mr McGRADY:** No, no. We had—

**Mr SEENEY:** Because of that cost, you extended the trial?

**Mr McGRADY:** No. We had low numbers of people involved in the trial. We increased the types of offenders, just like we are doing—with your support—to the work program. We increased the types of people who are involved in the trial and it will be evaluated in January and, all going well, we can implement this. I say to you now, on what I know of the scheme, I think it is the way to go in the future. I think it is a secure scheme, but we will not go down this path unless and until we have had the evaluation. That will start in January and this time next year, member for Callide, we may be in a position to say that this is what we have done, this is what we have spent and this is its success or otherwise. Likewise, we might come back to you and say, as a result of the tests and as a result of the evaluation, that we have decided not to go down this path. But please do not keep referring to this as a cost saving. Before we go out and spend the money, we want to make sure that what we are doing is the right way to go.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time for non-government questions has expired.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Minister, I understand you have introduced several measures to tighten up security to prevent prisoners absconding or escaping from our correctional facilities. I know we have had quite a deal of discussion here about electronic monitoring, but on page 3-9 of your MPS there is reference to the escape and abscond rates in Queensland prisons. How do these compare with previous years and what are you doing to improve this rate?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for that question. As I mentioned before to a previous question, we have a 100 per cent record during the period of our government from secure custody. There has not been one single escape from our secure prisons. In fact, just last night it would appear that staff were successful in averting what may have been an attempted escape from Woodford Correctional Centre. Late yesterday afternoon the centre was locked down when two head counts revealed that one inmate was not present. The prisoner, who was serving two and a half years for offences including break and enter, was soon located in a meal trolley in a secure area of the correctional centre. Now, some people might say he wanted to go into the kitchen to help clean up the dishes. I do not know. That could have been the case. The point I am making is that because of the way we check the prisoners that prisoner was stopped from escaping. I think that is a plus to the department and to those people who work in those prisons. There was no threat to security. As I said, this incident highlights just how efficient the staff are in dealing with potential security breaches. The inmate is currently being interviewed about the motivation for hiding in the trolley and, whilst it is still to be determined, it is possible—it is possible—that he was trying to escape.

Our successful management of incidents such as this is reflected in a recent productivity report which noted that Queensland had the lowest escape/abscond rate from secure custody and the second lowest escape/abscond rate from open custody in Australia. They are the figures. Our record in relation to this issue compares very favourably to the former coalition government's which oversaw, during its last year in office, 13 escapes from secure custody and a further 28 from either open custody or community custody.

As I said before, I am not trying to play politics, I am not trying to say that under our government the figures are a lot better than the previous coalition government—I am not saying that—but when people ask me the question, I have to give you the answer. People should understand that our record is a very enviable one and one which we are all very, very proud of.

**Mrs SMITH:** Page 3-13 of the MPS statement refers to the statewide introduction of urine based drug testing. Can you tell us when this will occur and how it will assist in offender management in Queensland?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. It will come as no surprise to anyone here when I say that drug abuse and its relationship to crime is one of the biggest hurdles being faced by the department. I mentioned before about the high numbers of people who are involved in drugs and crime. Figures show that on admission to prison, 60 per cent of all prisoners admit to using illicit drugs in the community. Drugs are, as you all know, an expensive habit and rarely one that can be afforded on an honest wage. So the link between drugs and crime is indisputable. It is a key goal of our government to attempt to break this link.

A pilot program of random urine testing of offenders on community orders was successfully trialled last financial year in the south-east corner of the state. Monthly random urine tests have been taken within prisons since 1999, and that will continue. The approximate monthly cost of this urine testing is \$12,000 and varies according to the number of prisoners selected for the random sample. The government has allocated \$1.7 million in this year's budget to expand urine drug testing statewide for offenders on those community orders. This funding will be utilised to employ additional staff, to operate a mobile testing unit in the metropolitan area, to undertake upgrades to offices that do not currently have urine testing facilities, and also staff training. Since 1996 the special condition requiring urine testing on orders from the court and community correction boards has increased by 288 per cent. In 2001 there were 1,211 orders with a special condition for drug testing. Trained officers and community corrections officers use an on-the-spot test to identify a range of drugs right across the board. If an offender provides a positive test result for illicit drugs, this result becomes the evidence of their breach. We take a hardline approach, as we should, to this. Community orders are a demonstration of trust. If this trust is broken, offenders will face serious consequences. This initiative further demonstrates the government's commitment to enhancing the supervision of offenders on community based orders.

**Mr ENGLISH:** On page 3-18 of the MPS it discusses the value of community service work performed. Could the minister outline some of the benefits to Queensland communities of this activity? What initiatives have been undertaken to increase the completion of community service orders?

**Mr McGRADY:** In the last financial year communities right across Queensland benefited from over 500,000 hours of community service, with a projected end of the year figure estimated to be in the order of 700,000 hours. This contribution will total approximately \$10.5 million. As well as making prisons more secure, the government is also keen to provide initiatives to allow for the effective rehabilitation of offenders, including preparation to the community by offenders. The aim of community service is to assist the offender's rehabilitation and to have the offenders return some benefit to the community in response to the offences they have committed. Offenders attend community service from one to five days a week. In some cases, a number of offenders continue to work in a voluntary capacity at the project after the completion of the allotted hours. A court may order an offender to perform community service as a sentencing option. Such orders include community service, fine option and intensive correction orders. The court can also direct offenders to perform a set number of hours of unpaid community work at not-for-profit organisations. Local community advisory committees approve each project. Community organisations that benefit include local councils, churches, sporting associations, environmental groups, and many others. The agencies organise work and provide on site supervision of the projects. More than 900 community service project sites have been established across the state. One example of these significant projects is the assistance given to the Quigley Street night shelter in Cairns. Accommodation is provided to both indigenous and non-indigenous homeless people. Community service workers are utilised in cleaning, food preparation and yard work. In the last 12 months, community workers have performed 3,600 hours of work. This is just one example of how offenders can carry out their sentence productively and in a way that benefits the community and of course the needy.

**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I refer to page 3-19 of the MPS which refers to a vocational training pilot program undertaken at Woodford Correctional Centre. Will the minister detail some of the achievements of prisoners in this program and how it assists not just offenders but the community?

**Mr McGRADY:** It is my firm belief that one of the best things we can do is to rehabilitate prisoners, that is, to give them skills which will lead to their gaining meaningful employment when they eventually return back to the community. If a prisoner can gain skills which may assist them to get a job when they are released, it significantly reduces the chances that they will return to a life of crime. Vocational training is a key element of this. Prisoners at Woodford Correctional Centre have undertaken furniture making, metal fabrication and a range of other skills. Prisoners

recently put newly learned skills in metal fabrication to good use in the construction of four graffiti clean-up trailers, which have been distributed to Queensland communities to undertake graffiti rapid removal programs. These trailers will be filled with equipment to remove graffiti and used by community volunteers as part of a rapid removal approach in a bid to combat the wilful damage caused by these graffiti vandals. This is one of the initiatives of the state graffiti task force, chaired so ably by Linda Lavarch. It is pleasing to see prisoners' work has the two-fold effect of teaching them new skills but also benefiting the state community. The graffiti trailer construction project was worked on by six prisoners and completed in just 13 days, with a total of 390 working hours going into the project. This task formed the first major project for the vocational education training plus skills based pilot program at Woodford. The graffiti trailer project helped prisoners complete part of the modules for a TAFE course. This vocational skills program is also under way at Capricornia and will be expanded to Maryborough when the centre opens. I believe that by giving prisoners these new skills we are assisting to break the cycle of crime and creating safer work communities, which are key priorities of our government.

There is one other area which technically I should not address because it concerns a bill before the parliament, that is, the tremendous success of the work program which basically assists those north-west and remote communities. A couple of months ago I had the opportunity to visit a number of these camps. They have certainly transformed many of those communities which were partly dying, but now they are being restored thanks to the work of the prisoners. I do appreciate the support of the shadow minister, the member for Callide, and of the opposition. They have already indicated that they will support this bill, and we appreciate that.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Page 3-25 of the MPS indicates the estimated actual income for revenue from user charges in 2001-02 was almost \$2 million more than the amount estimated in the 2001-02 budget. The note indicates that the majority of the increased revenue came from prison industries, which I know the minister spoke about in response to a previous question. Could the minister outline any new initiatives in the industries area and the impact such programs have on the rehabilitation of offenders?

**Mr McGRADY:** As the member said, prison authorities form a very integral part of the government's focus on rehabilitation. Most of the questions tonight have had some reference to rehabilitation. As I said a moment ago, we provide prisoners with the opportunity to gain vocational skills and a work ethic that will assist them to obtain employment when released from prison. Farming and industry activities are conducted at all 10 Queensland state-run correctional facilities. Industry activities are also carried out at the two privately managed facilities. Industry work provides vital services and products which benefit the wider community without having a negative impact on those local industries. In the last financial year, the rate of participation in industry activity equated to about 29 per cent of the eligible prisoners in secure custody prisons and about 39 per cent in open custody centres such as the farms.

A secondary benefit of industry activity is that the income from the sale of goods and services effectively reduces the cost of Queensland's prisons for the taxpayer. At the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre a trial of furniture assembly work is currently in progress. This work is the first non-traditional work opportunity made available to female prisoners. In October last year the Townsville prison implemented a full roll on, roll off linen service for the Townsville health service district. This service is the first of its kind provided by a Queensland prison and resulted in the creation of three additional custodian security positions. At the Rockhampton and Woodford centres a trial is currently in progress of improved means of delivering vocational training. Trade instructors have been trained to deliver vocational training, assess competencies and deliver practical vocational training on the job. Formal recognition of training is provided by local training service providers and all of these initiatives will provide prisoners with experience that will give them real employment options when they have served their term and return back into the community.

I have had the opportunity over the past 15 months to visit most of our prisons to see at first-hand some of the work being done. Some of the furniture you buy in the shops has been made in the prisons. At Lotus Glen, just outside of Mareeba, they make safety clothes for some of the mine workers in Papua New Guinea. It is an eye-opener to see what can be done in the prisons of our state. I am sure the director-general will not mind my saying to anyone on the panel who has not been inside our prisons that we would be more than happy to show you around, because it is certainly an eye-opener to see just what sort of work is being done to try to rehabilitate people. I wish I had time to speak about the Ipswich project, which was a huge success. If someone were to ask me, 'What happened at Ipswich?', I would be more than happy to tell you.

**Mrs SMITH:** I refer to the work conducted by community corrections boards, as noted on page 3-13 of the MPS. Can you outline recent changes to the appointment and make-up of these boards and the benefits these changes offer to enhancing the safety of Queenslanders?

**Mr McGRADY:** These boards are independent bodies which are responsible for decisions regarding the release of prisoners to post-prison community based orders and also reviewing prisoners' progress whilst under those orders. All decisions in relation to release-to-work, home detention programs or indeed parole orders are made by these community correction boards. As the minister, I am responsible for the appointment of these boards, but their work is necessary. It has to be impartial and entirely independent from both the government and the department. This is essential to guarantee the objectivity of the important decisions being made by these boards. Make no mistake, the decisions made by these boards can have wide-reaching ramifications, particularly in the case of prisoners being released only to reoffend. A delicate balance in judgment is required to ensure the safety of the Queensland community while offering offenders a chance at further rehabilitation. Again, it is this balance that we keep on talking about.

To ensure the maintenance of the integrity and effectiveness of these boards, earlier this year I initiated a new system of staggered appointments on the boards. It must be recognised by us all that community values are constantly changing. It is important that new blood is brought on to these boards to ensure that the boards reflect these changing community views, and new appointees will also bring a fresh perspective to the make-up of the boards. Under the old system, every three years the board would come up for reappointment and you would either reappoint the whole lot or you would bring in new members. Quite often you would have a whole new board being swept in and it would take months and months for them to understand what it is all about. What I am proposing to do now is that we have seven members on the board and every year I will look at two of those positions. If I feel there is a need to change, I will put on one or two new people so at all times we have a continuity of experience on the board. I think it is working well in the first round. The members I have spoken to think it is a good idea. This continues the continuity but, at the same time, as I mentioned a minute ago, community attitudes change from time to time. I think the days are gone when you had someone on the board for 15 years or 20 years. I think you need this change. I appreciate the work that these people have given to the community but, at the same time, we need this change and we also need the experience. That is the reason I implemented those changes late last year.

**The CHAIR:** The time for questions from government members having expired, I now call the member for Lockyer.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, given the commercial realities of privately run correction establishments and some security issues that have arisen in the private sector, does your department or the government have concerns about private prisons, particularly in connection with staffing levels?

**Mr McGRADY:** I think this is an area where you have to be very careful. The trend around the world is that we do have private prisons. Here in Queensland we have two. For one we recently called tenders and those tenders are now being evaluated. We will be making a decision in the not-too-distant future as to who the successful tenderer is. There is a point of view that all prisons should be run by the state. To some extent, I have sympathy with that point of view. But at the same time, you always need something to benchmark. That is one of the reasons we have in Queensland a private sector. I take a keen interest—

**Mr FLYNN:** I am sorry to interrupt, but does the government have any intention of increasing privatisation?

**Mr McGRADY:** No.

**Mr FLYNN:** That is it?

**Mr McGRADY:** There is no intention at all by the government to increase the number of privately run prisons in the state. I want to emphasise that. As I said a moment ago, there is a view that says that all prisons should be run by the state. I have some sympathy with that proposition. When you are running a prison system or running any large organisation you need something to benchmark. The fact that we do have private prisons in the state allows us to compare what we do as opposed to what they do. I think it would be wrong of me tonight in this gathering to be critical of either the state-run or indeed the private-run facilities. All I would say is that it is the policy of our government to continue to have those two privately-run prisons and there is no intention whatsoever, in any way, shape or form, of reducing the number of state-run prisons. In fact, the latest prisons that we have built around the state have been built and, importantly, will be managed by the state. I do not know whether you are familiar with the way in

which we do this. Private enterprise comes in and runs the place. Most of the assets are owned by the state. It is a question which from time to time should be discussed and debated, as you have done here tonight. That is the policy of our government. We will continue to have privately run prisons, but there will be no increase or enlargement of this policy. I think in recent times it has served the state well. Other people may disagree.

**Mr FLYNN:** The Palen Creek prison farm was once a very productive facility in farming and gave certain classes of prisoners a chance to learn new skills and provide some input into the local economy. Can you tell the committee what the long-term prospects are for this facility and whether there are any plans to close it?

**Mr McGRADY:** There are no plans at all to close it. As I said before, we need these facilities to rehabilitate people. Whenever I address meetings—Rotary meetings or political meetings—everybody has a view on what we should do with prisons and prisoners. If you go to any group of people and start talking about prisons, everybody has a view. There are no 'don't knows' or 'doubtfuls' in the conversation; they all have a strong view. There is one school of thought which says that you arrest them, take them to court, lock them up and throw away the key. People believe that and that is a proposition which deserves some consideration. I do not support it.

**Mr FLYNN:** For about two minutes, yes.

**Mr McGRADY:** I do not support it. The reason I do not support it is because one day that person, regardless of how horrendous the crime, will end up back out in the community and might live next door to you—he probably would not live next door to the member for Callide; he has got a big farm—or maybe next door to me.

**Mr FLYNN:** I live on acreage too, Minister.

**Mr McGRADY:** We then have that problem. The chances are that he or she would reoffend so quickly that they would be back inside within a matter of months. What we are trying to do is to rehabilitate people. There are many ways, and I have outlined some of them already. But I think the Palen Creek activities are all part of rehabilitation. It is an integral part of our government's policy. We have no intentions at all to reduce the activity there. In fact, where possible we will improve and increase that activity because I believe it is all part of the rehabilitation process which is so close to the policies of this government.

**Mr FLYNN:** With regard to the escape of prisoners mentioned earlier in any category—and maybe you would think that I should ask this question of the Attorney-General, but I am talking about prisons in the main—would you see any merit in mobile courts which might negate the need for most escorts given that you stated that most escapes take place under escort?

**Mr McGRADY:** As you rightly stated, this is a question for the Attorney-General. I think I would be offended if the Attorney-General started espousing how prisons should be run.

**Mr FLYNN:** But it crosses very much with your portfolio. With respect, Minister, the Attorney-General would probably refer me to you. Can I have some sort of reply?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mobile courts, as I said, do not come under my jurisdiction. But if you are asking me as an individual, to some extent I suppose we have mobile courts when you have the courts going up to the gulf country.

**Mr FLYNN:** I mean mobile courts as in the court coming to the prison, which is why I asked you.

**Mr McGRADY:** Sorry; so the court actually coming inside the prison?

**Mr FLYNN:** Yes.

**Mr McGRADY:** Sorry, but I misunderstood your question. I do not know. I have not really discussed that. I do not really have an opinion. As the director-general said, we do have the parole boards meeting inside the prisons but that is hardly a court. What we are doing though more and more is video conferencing, and I think that is important. We are using the latest technology to save some of the activities which have historically taken place. I think quite honestly there is scope for more and more video conferencing, whether it be in workshops or seminars, because there is a tremendous cost in transportation these days, as you would know. I just think that we are the Smart State and we should start utilising more and more of the modern facilities. So maybe that is one way of doing it.

**Mr FLYNN:** Finally, in connection with drugs and prisons, which was canvassed earlier at length, what general precautions are taken to ensure that prison staff are not used as drug vehicles?

**Mr McGRADY:** I from time to time meet with a number of prisoner organisations such as Sisters Inside and the likes. From time to time people imply that drugs are being brought in by people other than prisoners. I think it has been proven that visitors to the prisons certainly attempt to get drugs inside. It is all about balance, as I said before. I wonder how you or I would feel if we had legitimately gone to work to be searched and strip searched and all the rest.

**Mr FLYNN:** Come come now, Minister. We cannot afford to be too touchy-feely here. The police are subject to a great deal of scrutiny in relation to drugs and alcohol. I am not sure how far you are down the track of compulsory testing for police, so why not compulsory searches on random occasions for Corrective Services officers?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Flynn, I do not want to get involved in police and drugs.

**Mr FLYNN:** No.

**Mr McGRADY:** That is a different issue. One of the initiatives in recent times has been the building up of the intelligence inside the prison. As you would probably know through your experiences in your former life, there is not much that goes on inside a prison which does not come to the attention of the prison authorities in a very short period of time because of telephone systems and other forms. To a great extent we do rely upon the intelligence which is gathered by the professionals inside the prison. But the point I made before—and I think it is something which you have to bear in mind—is that these men and women who work inside the system are going to work. I have to say that, because of the vile nature of drugs inside the prison, obviously you have to consider any way at all in which drugs can get into the prison system. My understanding is that the bags of the prison officers go through the machinery which is in place at the entrance. So to a great extent they are checked, but when people suggest strip searching and—

**Mr FLYNN:** I was not quite going that far, although that might be a consideration for you.

**Mr McGRADY:** No, you did not.

**Mr FLYNN:** Checking their bags is hardly a precaution.

**Mr McGRADY:** That happens.

**Mr FLYNN:** What about random checks for officers at least to go through their pockets?

**Mr McGRADY:** As I said, I did not suggest that you suggested that you strip search the officers. What I am saying is that it has been suggested to me. Maybe Peter Severin, who has a lifetime involvement in the prison system—on the right side of the fence—may like to make a comment.

**Mr SEVERIN:** Thanks, Minister. The staff are subject to the same entry procedures as any visitor to a secure facility, so they are regularly subject to metal detection and all the materials that they take in—bags and anything of that nature—are screened through the detection system. Staff are also not allowed to take items in that are not clearly visible in see-through bags. There is a very comprehensive staff vetting process in place to vet people before they actually start employment with the department. As has already been mentioned, the intelligence process does not stop with prisoners; it involves anybody involved with Corrective Services. Obviously it is done professionally and in a way that we are reasonably satisfied that we are able to identify any behaviour patterns of staff that give rise to the thought that they might be introducing illicit substances. Staff are not subject to strip searches and not subject to body searches at this point in time. We are confident that that does prevent as much as it possibly can the introduction of drugs.

**Mr FLYNN:** Thank you Mr Severin and thank you Minister.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I refer you to page 3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and the part of it which involves responsibility for the release to community programs for work and other purposes. Can you outline the department's procedures for these services? What level of supervision is required to monitor prisoners who are allowed a leave of absence to undertake work or perform community service or visit their families or attend rehabilitation programs? Can you outline what level of supervision the department insists is required for those prisoners? How much money has been budgeted for those supervisory services?

**Mr McGRADY:** I will answer the last part of the question first. Some \$600,000 per year has been allocated for the next four years. The supervision of community service work has been a key

activity undertaken by field staff of the department. The use of work parties has been expanded to increasingly target non-compliant offenders and support special projects in the community—for example, the safe home at Petrie and the Brisbane Boarders Association. Staff are also responsible for the follow-up of non-compliant offenders, on-site supervision of work parties, liaison with existing community service projects and facilitating workplace health and safety audits. The project has also developed and implemented a wide range of enhanced case management practices for the various area officers, and this includes a regional induction package for offenders and also a video. The use of portable electronic devices, which we discussed briefly before, will certainly enhance the process of recording community service information. A 12-month pilot project will operate in south-east Queensland and involve eight of our area officers. The use of the devices will reduce duplication of effort in entering data and allow more time to be devoted to addressing issues relating to the effective management of offenders on community service orders. It is anticipated that the devices will be operating in the field by the end of this month. The costs will be met as per the budget. As I said before, funding has been allocated at \$600,000 a year for the next four years.

**Mr SEENEY:** So that \$600,000 does include some allocation for electronic monitoring? That is not just for monitoring by prison officers which happens at the moment?

**Mr McGRADY:** That is separate from the electronic monitoring which we discussed before.

**Mr SEENEY:** So the department allocates \$600,000 a year to monitor those people who are released on those programs?

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes.

**Mr SEENEY:** Is there an allocation in the budget for adoption of electronic technology for monitoring release to work prisoners and prisoners on home leave?

**Mr McGRADY:** No, not at this stage.

**Mr SEENEY:** Is there any intention to adopt that type of technology for those programs, apart from the home detention programs? I am talking about people who are on release to work programs.

**Mr McGRADY:** That would be somewhat difficult, because those people are in fact moving around, aren't they?

**Mr SEENEY:** But the technology exists to be able to monitor where those people go after they are released from prison.

**Mr McGRADY:** I will ask the director-general to expand on that.

**Ms RINGROSE:** The current electronic monitoring technology we use is really only suitable for one area, such as a domestic residence.

**Mr SEENEY:** Home detention?

**Ms RINGROSE:** Yes. We could not use that for release to work because those release to work prisoners catch trains and move long distances from their home bases, which are the open custody centres. It would require a different kind of technology, such as global satellite positioning technology, that could in theory be applied to release to work prisoners. We have not trialled that because at this stage it has yet to be proven that that technology is 100 per cent effective. It is being trialled overseas, and we are watching that very carefully. Clearly, it could be an advantage, but it is very expensive and one that I am sure the government would have to look at very closely.

**Mr SEENEY:** In relation to the new prison at Maryborough, are there any programs in place to employ local people? Are there any training programs in place at the moment given that that new prison is due to open soon?

**Mr McGRADY:** The rock and roll concert is at Maryborough, isn't it? Have you heard about that?

**Mr SEENEY:** The ball. I have heard about the ball.

**Mr McGRADY:** Have you bought a ticket yet?

**Mr SEENEY:** I haven't received an invitation yet. I have been waiting for you to invite me.

**Mr McGRADY:** It is a fundraising activity. It is Jail House Rock.

**Mr SEENEY:** What about job opportunities for the local people?

**Mr McGRADY:** From memory, there are 300 jobs at the Maryborough centre. In fact, we just discussed this the other day. I have made it perfectly clear that I want to see as many of those jobs being occupied by local people.



**Mr SEENEY:** Are you offering any training programs?

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes, 70 per cent of those 300 jobs will hopefully go to the local community, and there will be training for those people who are obviously selected to come in. This is an issue which I raised myself the other day because I think it is important. The reason that, as a government, we selected Maryborough at the time was the high unemployment. We do not make any apologies for that. We needed an additional prison, so we looked around the state to see where the prison could best assist the community. At that time there was some opposition to a prison being built, but overall it was widely accepted. Now we are getting more and more people fighting for a new prison. We had a whole series of letters from local councillors and Chambers of Commerce saying, 'We have heard the rumour that you are going to build a new women's prison. Can we have it in our shire?' People understand that when you build a prison not only do you have jobs in the construction period but obviously you have other jobs inside the system. As we have stated here, there will be 300 additional jobs at Maryborough, and 70 per cent of them will go to the locals. The other 30 per cent would be people being transferred—people who currently work in the system who would like to go on. I will continue with my advertisement for the initiative of the Mayor of Gayndah. Is that in your electorate, Mr Seeney?

**Mr SEENEY:** Yes.

**Mr McGRADY:** I forget his name, but he hit on a bright idea that before the prisoners move in they will have this Jail House Rock. They are selling tickets. With my background I will probably be there, and I will probably invite Helen to come along, too, and we will show them how to rock and roll and a few other things.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, you have not answered my question. I appreciate that information, but are there any recruitment programs or training programs being offered to the people of Maryborough so that they can take advantage of the new prison facility?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Chairman, I crave your protection. The question was asked of me, and I did say—and I will repeat what I said—that there are approximately 300 jobs that are going to be provided at Maryborough. Of those 300, 70 per cent will be going to local people.

**Mr SEENEY:** But there is no recruitment program -

**Mr McGRADY:** Hold on. It is getting close to your bedtime, so just calm down.

**Mr SEENEY:** I am trying to get an answer.

**Mr McGRADY:** I will give you an answer. Just hold on. So 70 per cent are going to be local people. There will be training programs for those local people. As I understand it, the director-general has had some talks with a recruiting company which I understand is based in Maryborough.

**Mr SEENEY:** When do you expect the recruitment to start?

**Mr McGRADY:** After we have taken over the prison.

**Mr SEENEY:** When will that be?

**Mr McGRADY:** When it is finished—towards the end of the year.

**Mr SEENEY:** After the ball?

**Mr McGRADY:** Not necessarily. What we will probably do is have the ball once we have accepted it. As you would appreciate with your intelligence—and you have lots of intelligence—once it becomes a prison there are certain things you can and cannot do inside a prison. So we would have to facilitate the ball. But remember this figure: 70 per cent of locals will get jobs. They will be trained, and they will probably be recruited by a local agency. Hopefully it will be a local company that will recruit, but that is a matter between the director-general and the local community.

**The CHAIR:** The time for questions from non-government members has expired. I call the member for Redlands.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Page 3-7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements mentions community custody facilities. Could you outline what role these centres play in rehabilitating offenders and how effective the release to work program is? Feel free to expand on what is happening in Ipswich.

**Mr McGRADY:** The release to work program is, I believe, an important step in getting prisoners back into the community and ensuring that they do not reoffend. The program allows prisoners to gradually re-enter society by allowing them to stay at a community custody centre or

what is commonly referred to as a halfway house while partaking in work. In many cases the prisoners have secured their first legal job through this program.

Release to work centres provide 24-hour monitoring and supervision of prisoners returning to the community in order to provide the greatest degree of protection to that community. The release to work program operates from four community correctional centres in south-east Queensland. Prisoners are strictly supervised while they seek and obtain employment in the community. Once they are employed they are required to pay board and lodging. Their savings are held in trust to ensure that they can afford accommodation and living expenses once they are released. Two employment officers provide support to the prisoners to help them find jobs. These officers also check the suitability of employers and ensure prisoners attend work as required. If at any time a prisoner infringes the conditions of the order, they are returned to secure custody.

Forty-four per cent of prisoners discharged at their full-time release date or released with remission in 1997 were subject to a further prison term within two years. By way of comparison, only 24 per cent of those released to release to work in the same period were again sentenced to imprisonment within that time frame. In 1998, 34 per cent of prisoners discharged at the end of their sentence were imprisoned again within two years whereas only 13 per cent of those released to release to work had been sentenced to further imprisonment within two years. I think these figures demonstrate the valuable impact this program has in breaking that crime cycle we have talked about so much tonight, which is a key aim of our government, and helping to create a safer community.

We have spoken tonight about the power of drugs. I recall going to one of these halfway houses. It was a women's centre. In this instance people go from the prison into the halfway house and then next door to the Helana Jones house. It is a beautiful home—probably as nice as any home in Brisbane—yet people are so captured by drugs that they are prepared to go back on to drugs even though it means going back inside a secure prison. They are forced to give away the luxury of living in this house, probably the nicest home they have ever lived in in their lives. Yet the power of drugs is so strong that they risk all of that to go back onto this poison.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, we have probably nearly demanded that you tell us about Ipswich.

**Mr McGRADY:** I thought nobody was ever going to ask. It is a good news story. It is also a sad story. A young teenager who has a disability had a vision, if you like, of the old computers all around government being fixed up by somebody and donated to groups in Ipswich. We got old computers from government departments and took them inside the prison. People came in and trained the prisoners in how to repair the computers. I attended a function at Ipswich organised by the city council and Paul Pisasale at which we donated these computers to 12 different charities—the CWA and that type of organisation.

At the function the young man who has this severe disability made a little speech in which he said, 'This is a dream of mine. Because we have people in the right places, people of goodwill, it became a reality.' Some prisoners now have a piece of paper that says they can fix computers, these 12 charities now have computers for the first time and a young man with a severe disability feels he has made a very valuable contribution to his local community. They are the sorts of things you do not read or hear too much about. That is what is happening, and that is as a result of the work that was done inside our prison system. Instead of a win-win situation, in this case it was a win-win-win-win situation.

**Mrs CHRISTINE SCOTT:** Page 3-12 of the ministerial portfolio statement mentions the 2002 report on government services. How does the Queensland corrections system compare with the corrections systems in other states?

**Mr McGRADY:** A report on government services was recently released. It provided national data for financial years up to and including the last financial year across corrective services portfolios. This report reaffirmed Queensland's position as the leading provider of services in the Commonwealth. Queensland performed well nationally in relation to escape rates from secure custody, achieving the lowest escape rate from secure custody in that financial year.

Queensland achieved the lowest rate of return to community corrections by ex-prisoners, completing a community audit in 1998-99 at 9.2 per cent. Queensland was well below the Australian average of 17.6 per cent and was followed by South Australia at 12.6 per cent. Queensland also achieved the lowest rate of returns to either community corrections or prison for ex-offenders completing a community order in the same year. I am particularly proud of the findings that Queensland had the lowest death rate of all prisoners from apparent unnatural causes and the lowest death rate, by a significant margin, of indigenous prisoners from apparent unnatural causes.

Queensland was a strong performer in the rehabilitation stakes as well. We had the highest rate of prisoners undertaking higher education courses and the third highest overall rate of prisoners undertaking education and training, as well as the second highest rate of successful completion of restricted movement orders—the issue of retention we referred to before. We also had the lowest average recurrent cost per prisoner per day, at \$108.40 per prisoner per day. This suggests that we are spending taxpayers' dollars wisely while at the same time ensuring that essential security requirements are met. We all too often hear the bad side of prison activity. I think when they consider those reports most people would say that, whilst we can never be complacent, the record basically speaks for itself.

**Mrs SMITH:** Page 3-19 of the MPS discusses the expansion of sex offender treatment programs within Corrective Services. What will be the benefits of this expansion and how will this assist sexual offenders to address their offending behaviour?

**Mr McGRADY:** I believe that offences of a sexual nature are amongst the most disturbing of all crimes. By offering rehabilitation programs to attempt to change offenders' behaviour, I think we can assist in ensuring the community is kept safe from these people. Within this context the government is expanding its sex offender management and intervention programs in an attempt to enhance community safety.

Funding for the expansion has been freed up through savings gained by reducing workshops, travel and conference expenses within the department. We need to concentrate on core business and rehabilitation programs for serious offenders. So we have gained \$100,000 from those savings and they will simply be moved across into the two community sex offender programs which will now be offered in the four prisons around the regions. This is a total of eight programs across the state, which is a doubling.

The sex offender intervention program will be introduced into Woodford prison and Borallon. An additional indigenous sex offender treatment program will also be offered at Stuart Creek at Townsville. The entry criteria for the sex offender program will be reviewed to open the program up to a broader range of sexual offenders, including those who have offended against adults.

The requirement for efficient and effective programs is recognised, and it is certainly supported by our government. We have used every available program to provide every offender with the best possible chance of addressing their offending behaviour. Our expansion of these programs, I think, is reflective of this commitment. It is something I know people call for all of the time. I think this demonstrates our commitment to trying to give these people who are guilty of this terrible offence some way of trying to change their pattern.

**Mr ENGLISH:** Page 3-17 of the ministerial portfolio statement makes reference to therapeutic programs for prisoners to address offending behaviour. Can you give details of any of the sorts of programs which are on offer to assist prisoners in this regard?

**Mr McGRADY:** I again thank the member for Redlands for the question. In fact, it is a timely question, because the fruits of labour carried out in one of those therapeutic programs that you mentioned are actually on display today at the State Law Building. When I first became the minister and I started to travel around the prisons of Queensland, one of the first things that I noticed was the magnificent indigenous artwork. I thought to myself—and I discussed it with the director-general—what a way to try to instil some confidence back into these people, who in many cases are locked away for long periods of time. So we organised an art exhibition of indigenous prisoner art at Parliament House and we had about 500 people who came through.

When it was over I wrote letters to the prisoners who had participated in the exhibition just to explain to them what happened that night. People came across and we sold paintings valued at \$16,000 that night. What we did was take 20 per cent out of that and the rest—the 80 per cent—went into a trust fund, which will be given to the prisoner when he or she leaves and goes back out. What it did was to give them a sense of pride and also, in talking to some of them, the fact that they know that they can now do better, they can go out there and they can probably make a living out of being an artist. Some of the pieces of art were valued in excess of 10,000. So that is one area.

As I mentioned yesterday, to celebrate NAIDOC week we opened an exhibition in the foyer. Before I came down here today I just checked and I understand that a lot of people are, in fact, going through. We also had a visit yesterday from a lady from the national gallery in Canberra who had heard about this program. Not only did we have it in Parliament House, we then took the exhibition to Townsville and then later on this year in September, to commemorate the Year of the Outback, we will take it to Mount Isa. This lady had heard about the work that we are doing and was quite flabbergasted at the success that we were having.

To display art, that is fine, but I think that the really important thing is the fact that it has given these artists inside the understanding that they can do better with their lives, that it is part of this rehabilitation process. I certainly hope that when these people are released that they will be able to carry on their talents and make a good living from it. Hence, one would hope, they never come back inside. So I just think that that is something that we should all be very, very proud of.

**The CHAIR:** The western outreach camp—or WORC program—has been an outstanding success in assisting rural communities since its establishment. At page 3-18 of the MPS it states that \$700,000 worth of community work was performed in 2001-02 in western Queensland as part of this program. What sort of projects did this work encompass?

**Mr McGRADY:** As I mentioned before, I had the opportunity, together with the deputy director-general and some of our members of parliament, to go through and see some of these WORC camps. I have to say that I was more than impressed with what had happened. These camps are at Boulia, Blackall, Winton, Charleville and a number of other places. What is happening now, of course, is that more and more councils are starting to write in and ask can they be considered to have one in their place.

What happens is that the department—or the government—builds a camp on the outskirts of town, about 10 kilometres outside, and a special type of prisoner is housed there. They come in on a daily basis and they do work in the local community—work that has been decided upon by a local community group. The council normally provides the material, we provide the labour and, of course, the accommodation. As I said before, I have seen towns that were literally dying that have been transformed. As an example, in Boulia they built this magnificent little bridge like a Japanese bridge—a wooden one—in the middle of a garden. They have renovated the sportsgrounds, they have tidied up the town. In Blackall they put numbers on every house and transformed the whole town.

The important thing is that we do not do this in competition with local contractors. So we are not taking work away from people. I have to say—and I hope that the media does not take this down—that I was talking to one of them in Boulia and he said, 'I just love this job; it is like a holiday camp.' I said, 'Don't mention that word.' They have become part of the community. They are accepted by the community. Before the scheme takes place, we get the support of the local community. It is something that we do not impose on people, but quite honestly we are being requested time and time again.

That is the reason why we have this legislation before the parliament, because the number of prisoners who are available to participate in the scheme is going down for a number of reasons. Quite honestly, I was faced with the option of closing down some of these camps, which is something that I just was not prepared to do. So what I did was to talk to the opposition and I secured their support, which I am grateful for. I took it to cabinet and cabinet agreed. Now that is a matter that will be debated in parliament.

It is something that we should all be very, very proud of. As most of you know, this was started after the Charleville floods when it was decided that the prisoners would go out there and help to fix the town up after the floods. When the work was done, somebody thought—I think that it was former Minister Glen Milliner—that it would be a great idea to have this on a permanent basis. I think that it is one of the great success stories of what the department and the government have done.

**Mrs SMITH:** Further to that previous question, page 3-8 of your MPS refers to the WORC program. I know a number of communities in my electorate have actually benefited from this program and from the work done by those people. Can you elaborate on how successful the program is in actually rehabilitating prisoners?

**Mr McGRADY:** I certainly can, because as I have mentioned a number of times tonight, it is all about rehabilitation. That is the reason why we have these various schemes. As I said before, the option is to put them inside, throw away the key and one day they get released. The rate of offenders being returned to prison for further offences who have actually participated in this program is approximately half that of comparable offenders who have not been in the program. I think that speaks for itself. That is certainly a significant difference and I am sure that everybody here would agree with that.

The program allows prisoners to develop a sound work ethic. Prisoners are required to commence work at specific times that suits the WORC camp, as opposed to a structured prison routine, mirroring the requirements that they will encounter in the community. Tasks like concreting, landscaping, fencing and painting provide real workplace experiences through which

prisoners can develop marketable work skills. That is vital if they are to successfully seek employment when they are released. A former prisoner gainfully employed will be far less likely to reoffend. Prisoners also interact with local communities, which are welcoming of their services, as I mentioned before—activities like building playground equipment for the Mitchell kindergarten or painting the local church. I have to say 'local churches' because they do not just do the Catholic Church or the Anglican Church, they do the lot—the Salvation Army as well. So there is no religious bias there. They have also helped out the Clermont gold festival and built the fence near Charleville to protect the endangered bilby. That allows prisoners to really feel part of that community. Again, as Peter and I were walking down some of the main streets of these towns, people had the idea that we were coming to close it down. They asked, 'You are not going to close down the WORC scheme, are you?' We said, 'No. In actual fact, we are trying to expand it.' When you have been around and you have seen the work of these prisoners, it certainly is gainful employment for these people. The facts are that if you can leave prison and go out and get a job—as proven in these figures—the chances of you re-offending and going back into prison are halved.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Police and Corrective Services has expired. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance. Before you leave, I remind you 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. That also concludes the committee's consideration of matters referred to it by parliament on 21 June 2002. I would like to thank my fellow members of Estimates Committee B and all those parliamentary officers who have assisted with the conduct of this hearing. I now declare this—

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Chairman, just before you declare the session closed, can I just thank you for the way in which you have worked during these proceedings. Can I also thank the members of the committee for the excellent way in which they have asked their questions and been prepared to enter into robust but, in my opinion, sensible discussion. I thank the opposition members for their contribution and also, of course, the government.

Can I place on record in the *Hansard* my thanks and appreciation to all of my personal staff. I am sure most of you would know that preparing for estimates such as this takes a great deal of dedication and work far beyond the call of duty. My personal staff—and I believe I have got the best of all the ministerial officers—have certainly excelled. Thanks to the Queensland Police Service staff, who we get great co-operation from, and also to Corrective Services and to the Prostitution Licensing Authority who, whilst we did not have too many questions for them, did a lot of preparation.

I think that the introduction of the estimates system is one of the greatest things that has happened in this parliament for a long, long time. Not only does it give you the opportunity to question the minister, but the reverse side of the coin is that it forces the minister to become more acquainted with the portfolio. I was a minister prior to estimates and I have been involved in a great number of estimate debates and I have to say that, as a minister, you are simply forced to become well acquainted with your portfolio. You do not simply sit back and wait for question time in the parliament. You have to know every cent that is being spent. You are asking questions to director-generals. 'I need this information in case I am asked a question.' So, you do go through the system with a far better understanding and you also find out where some of the perks are in all the departments, which is nice to know.

I know that when we come to the parliament and we have the robust debate we will be accused of hiding behind facts and figures, but that is part of political life and that is the job of the opposition. Again, I particularly thank the opposition for the way in which they have conducted themselves, particularly the leader of One Nation, who does not have very many resources—probably some would say he has too many. In reality, you do not have the resources which some other parties do have and I congratulate you on the research you obviously did. Again, to the opposition shadow minister, you have obviously put a great deal of thought into your questions and, likewise, the government members. I am delighted with the way it went and I thank everybody who has been involved in this. Thanks a million.

**The CHAIR:** Order! I thank the minister for his comments and I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 7.18 p.m.