

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE E**

Mr C. P. Cummins (Chair)  
Mr H. W. T. Hobbs  
Dr J. A. Kingston  
Ms C. Molloy  
Mr R. L. Poole  
Mr J. W. Seeney  
Mrs C. E. Sullivan

**NATURAL RESOURCES AND MINES****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. S. Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources and Mines  
Mr T. Hogan, Director-General  
Mr R. Freeman, Deputy Director-General, Natural Resources Services  
Mr S. Spencer, Deputy Director-General, Integrated Resource Management  
Mr B. Coulter, Deputy Director-General, Mines  
Dr G. Gentle, Executive Director, Strategic Directions  
Mr G. Dickie, Executive Director, Native Title Services  
Mr P. Noonan, Chief Executive Officer, SunWater  
Mr P. Philipson, General Manager, Finance and Asset Management  
Mr C. Robson, Executive Director, Natural Resource Sciences

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The committee commenced at 8.41 a.m.

**The CHAIR:** I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee E now open. I am Chris Cummins, the member for Kawana and chair of the committee. My fellow committee members are Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego; Cate Molloy, the member for Noosa; Robert Poole, the member for Gaven; Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone; and Geoff Seeney, the member for Callide.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2002 for the portfolios of Natural Resources and Mines, Environment, and Local Government and Planning—in that order. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time of the questions at today's hearing is allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns at asking questions in blocks lasting approximately 20 minutes. In relation to media coverage of today's hearings, the committee has resolved that video coverage is allowed only during the opening statements. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript. Please also ensure that mobile phones and pagers are switched off while in the chamber so as not to disrupt the proceedings.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 195, the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearings at the pleasure of the committee.

The first area to be examined is the proposed expenditure for the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio. The committee will consider the estimates of the organisational units in the following order: the government owned corporation SunWater, the Department of Mines and then the Department of Natural Resources. The time allocated is three hours 15 minutes with a 15-minute break between 10 a.m. and 10.15 a.m.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines open for examination. The question before the committee is:

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I welcome the minister and representatives from SunWater who are in attendance today. Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning? If you do wish to make a statement, the committee asks that you limit it to five minutes.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you. I do have some brief opening remarks. The appropriations to my department being considered by the committee today are a clear demonstration of the commitment of the Beattie government to the long-term sustainable use of our natural resources. Because of the inherent characteristics of natural resources, my department perhaps more than any other government agency needs at all times to be focusing on long-term outcomes. The sustainable development regimes we are putting in place with industry and the community are the basis of the state's ongoing prosperity. Therefore, the budget continues the emphasis on long-term resource planning frameworks.

The budget also clearly indicates the enormous breadth of the work within the portfolio. In addition to our ongoing responsibilities for land, water, vegetation, minerals and petroleum, this year my department will be responsible for the full range of the government's native title functions. This results from the transfer of the Native Title Services Unit from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. This decision will provide further impetus to one of the government's primary aims of adopting an integrated approach to managing our natural resources. We are also placing increasing emphasis on grassroots community involvement in natural resource decision making. Although it is generally acknowledged that this can take more time, there is no doubt that community ownership leads to more lasting and sustainable outcomes.

I would now like to draw the committee's attention to some of the other highlights of this year's appropriations. In recognition that exploration is the key to a sustainable mining industry and its associated social and economic benefits, additional funding of \$9.2 million will be made available to support exploration attraction over four years.

The committee would all be aware of the tragedy that occurred at the Bray Park State School in May 2000 and would have followed the coroner's inquest earlier this year. In response to the recommendations of the coroner, additional inspectors for explosives will be appointed to undertake more intensive monitoring of the fireworks industry. With funding of \$2.4 million over four years, community safety will be enhanced through better control of explosives in general and fireworks specifically.

The committee would appreciate the critical importance of science to the Natural Resources and Mines portfolio, and in many areas the department leads the way with best practice programs such as those relating to mine safety and the Statewide Land and Tree Study. This study provides for a satellite monitoring program to support Queensland's vegetation management framework. Funding of \$6.4 million over four years will provide for the continued provision through this program of accurate scientific information to underpin decision making relating to vegetation management, salinity risk and greenhouse gas emissions from land use change.

As I said at the outset, the department has a diverse and extensive program of work planned for this financial year. The program incorporates issues such as the ongoing implementation of water reform, the implementation of the new Land Protection (Pest and Stock Route Management) Act, the implementation of the new Petroleum and Gas Act and the provision of geoscience data and information to assist prospectors. It also includes the ongoing state investment of \$81 million over seven years, which will be matched by the Commonwealth, in support of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. This budget will continue to deliver balanced programs for the sustainable use and management of the state's land, water, vegetation, minerals and petroleum resources. I look forward to discussing the details with the committee.

**The CHAIR:** The first round of questions is from the non-government members. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** As you have directed that the first questions about SunWater should be in the first bracket of questions, could I begin with a question about SunWater. I note that there is no provision in the budget documents for the receipt of a dividend by the government from SunWater. You are obviously not expecting a dividend from SunWater this year. Could you

confirm that and could you indicate when you would expect SunWater to pay a dividend to the government?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** SunWater's profit figure of 2001-02 is not yet finalised, but I am aware of some factors that may have resulted in higher than budgeted profit. One factor that will influence the final profit level is the accounting treatment of a gain in one of SunWater's subsidiaries. However, this does not represent a cash profit.

In terms of whether there will be a dividend to government, that matter is not resolved at this point in time. The Treasurer has yet to approach me with respect to that issue. So I cannot assist you any further; but at this stage there is no intention to claim a dividend from SunWater.

**Mr SEENEY:** If there is no intention to claim a dividend from SunWater to the government, what do you envisage will happen with the profit that is accumulating?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That would be a matter for SunWater and I will hand it over to Peter Noonan.

**Mr NOONAN:** Some of the profit that arises from SunWater, as the minister was alluding to, is based on cash figures and some of it is not. Where there is cash to support the profit, it will be used for a range of activities. First of all, it will be used to support the substantial backlog program that we have committed to in the corporatisation of SunWater. It will also be used for new developments and SunWater has recently announced the development of a mini-hydro, so the cash will be used for that type of new development project. Of course, there is also a range of other activities that are not supported by direct funding, such as the management of the recreation facilities and so forth.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I refer you to page 17 of the MPS, integrated natural resource management and use, and notes 2 and 7 of the output statement of financial performance which states that there was an increased community service obligation payment to SunWater of \$2.1 million. What was the total community service obligation paid to SunWater in 2001-02 and what is the amount budgeted for this year?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Last year's CSO payment to SunWater was \$16 million made up of rural water subsidy of \$9.4 million, new works—that is completion of existing projects—\$4.9 million and regulatory transition, \$1.7 million. The CSO envisaged for 2002-03 is a payment of \$9.24 million, made up of a rural water subsidy, all schemes, for \$7.961 million and regulatory transition of \$1.279 million. As you would be aware, as the price paths mature that allows—and it was always envisaged—the CSO from government to reduce accordingly as the price paths in each of the schemes matured.

**Mr SEENEY:** The continued implementation of the water reform agenda is listed as a future development on page 16 of the MPS. In recent days, both you and the Premier have foreshadowed that Queensland may not receive its third tranche of national competition payments if certain water reforms are not undertaken; in particular, an increase in the cross water flows from the Condamine-Balonne system has been mentioned. Can you explain to the committee exactly what obligations Queensland has in order to ensure that those NCP payments are made?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** We have moved off SunWater? Is that all the questions you had in regard to SunWater?

**Mr SEENEY:** That is right.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** In relation to the next tranche of payments from the National Competition Council, we received a report in about November of last year that clearly indicated that unless we resolved issues in the Condamine-Balonne pertaining to returning flows back to the environment the next tranche of competition payments were at risk. The value of those competition payments, as the Premier indicated during the week, is some \$128 million. That is the maximum that may be at risk. As to what would actually be the penalty imposed on Queensland by the NCC, that is a matter that the NCC and indeed the federal treasurer have not yet determined. That, of course, is a matter to be considered once we provide the NCC with this year's report on progress on water reform.

**Mr SEENEY:** What are the specific measures the department has to meet to ensure that those NCP payments are made? What specific milestones do you have to meet?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will refer that question to the director-general.

**Mr HOGAN:** There is a range of requirements under NCC. The one relating to the Condamine-Balonne, I understand, relates to the actual amount of water left in the system after the extractions have occurred. A range of figures is being put about by a range of people. The NCC mentions a range of possibilities about extraction limits on the system down to the return of a third of the current extractions back into the system.

**Mr SEENEY:** The NCC sets that figure?

**Mr HOGAN:** As the minister said, there has been no determination yet by the NCC which way they would go in regard to a particular figure.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Needless to say, we have to take their views on board in further reporting on progress in water reform in Queensland.

**Mr SEENEY:** I am trying to determine what the milestones actually are, what the government is obliged to do in regard to the Condamine-Balonne system. Surely you can inform the committee what your department has to do to ensure that the government receives these NCP payments. We are talking about considerable sums of money. Surely you have a clear understanding of what your department has to do to ensure that the Queensland government receives that money.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** There is an expectation from the NCC's report of last year that one indicator of the Queensland government's continuing commitment to water reform in this state is the return of flows back into the environment in the Condamine-Balonne.

**Mr SEENEY:** So that is a clear understanding that you took from the report. It is not specifically stated in the report? Is the figure mentioned in the report? Is there a milestone? Is there a level? Is there any real indication or is that something that you took from the report?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The NCC indicated in its report that there were expectations that the flows to be returned to the Condamine-Balonne would exceed those, in fact be significantly better than the, three scenarios that were contained in the draft water resource plan that we retired from as a result of certain legal action occurring last year. If the NCC is suggesting that the extractions envisaged in the draft water resource plan are not acceptable, then that sets a minimum of water that it would be expecting to be returned back to the environment, but the council was not specific on that figure. Needless to say, whatever amount settled on would need to accord with a range of environmental and ecological indicators to suggest that the health of the river system would be improved over time.

**Mr SEENEY:** You mentioned the Condamine-Balonne water resource plan and the fact that it was abandoned after the legal action that you referred to. The budget this year again contains predictions about the number of water resource plans that you expect to complete. It is notable that last year you predicted that you would complete six but you did not complete any at all, of which the Condamine-Balonne was just one. What changes have you made within the department since the department withdrew from that Land Court case to ensure that the department decisions are now based on scientific data that can be validated and verified and will stand up to challenge in court?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** As you would be aware, from that court case a review was undertaken of the science that the department had been using to determine a range of indicators of ecological health in the river system, and part of that was also greater reliability in monitoring flows et cetera. That review recommended, if my memory serves me correctly, about 60 changes or improvements that were suggested by the independent panel. Again if I recall correctly, those recommendations were taken on board and the vast majority were implemented. As a result, the current studies that are going on out in the Condamine, particularly on the Lower Balonne, are proof that those recommendations were accepted and as a result our science will be better.

**Mr SEENEY:** When do you expect the Condamine-Balonne water resource plan to be released?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That depends on a range of issues. Obviously the current discussions with the federal government in terms of a package of measures to allow water to be returned to the environment needs to be exhausted. I am informed that later this week federal cabinet, or a subcommittee of federal cabinet, will be considering the proposal that has received some attention over the last week or so. After we hear back from the federal government as to what its attitude is, we will be in a position then to know with greater clarity the timetable that is before us.

**Mr SEENEY:** Is it not the case that it is the failure to complete that water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne system that is threatening the receipt of NCC dividends? It is the failure

to progress the water reform program in Queensland, specifically the failure to achieve a water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne, that is currently threatening the receipt of the NCC dividends?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I do not think that it is correct to say it is a failure to progress the water resource plan. The water resource planning process continues to be progressed. I think it is more accurate to say that the NCC expects closure to be brought to the water resource planning process. Of course, what challenges us in the Condamine-Balonne is that there is not a consensus of views in the community to finalise that plan. There are three distinct subcatchment groups along the Condamine-Balonne that have quite different views about what a final water resource plan should look like and who is responsible for the significant extractions from the river system. To say that trying to reach consensus in the catchment is a challenge is perhaps an understatement. Nonetheless, in recognition of the fact that we need to return water to the system, we also need to determine how best to achieve that with, if you like, the minimal amount of pain being inflicted on existing water users in the Condamine-Balonne.

What underpins our thoughts—and this is one of the things that I think, quite modestly, I have brought to this department—is a greater focus on socioeconomic outcomes of the water resource planning process and not just the ecological outcomes. The work that we do is far broader than perhaps was previously the case. When we do look at water issues in difficult catchments like the Condamine-Balonne, the challenge is achieving not just ecological outcomes but economically sustainable outcomes at the same time. I am sure the member would agree that that is important. The member has stood in the parliament on a number of occasions and called for exactly that kind of work. I can assure the member that it is taking place. As a result, perhaps existing timelines, or timelines that were envisaged last year, have had to be reviewed whilst that additional work occurs. The one thing that I am quite solid on is ensuring that the water resource planning process does take in economic and social outcomes as well as ecological outcomes.

**Mr SEENEY:** As the minister predicted, I certainly agree with much of that, but I want a reason for the extended delay for the water resource plan in the Condamine-Balonne. It would be correct to say that the major reason for that is the fact that the department's scientific basis for that water resource plan was challenged, found to be wanting and not able to be validated and verified. Would the minister agree that that is the major reason why the water resource plan is two years overdue and that that is the major reason why the government faces a reduction in its national competition dividends?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I would not agree with that whatsoever. There have been many reasons for the delay in bringing down a water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne, some of which I have already talked about, including the lack of consensus that exists throughout the catchment and the fact that people cannot with one voice come to the table and engage with the department. We need to try to meet a range of views. Of course, having received the NCC report in November last year that ruled out the draft scenarios contained in the previous water resource plan, obviously we had to go back and do a significant amount of work to respond to the NCC report. Of course, having come up with a view on how to respond to the NCC report in terms of returning significant extractions back into the river system, we started to develop a plan in concert with the federal government, and that is currently before a federal cabinet subcommittee. If the federal cabinet subcommittee ticks off on the proposal, I would be confident of bringing in a water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne by the end of the year. If not, we will have to do further work on alternatives. It is a bit rich for anyone from the National Party to be critical of this government's attempt to bring down a water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne since it was as a result of activities when the member was in government that the problems with significant extractions were caused in the first place. When the National Party was in power, 550 gegalitres were being taken out of that river system. By the time the moratorium was put in place, that had been put in place.

**Mr Hobbs** interjected.

**The CHAIR:** Order!

**Mr ROBERTSON:** As I said, when the National Party was in power 550 gegalitres were being taken out of that river system. By the time we brought in the moratorium on further water extractions, it had increased to over 900 gegalitres, a 60 per cent increase. When Mr Hobbs stood in the parliament during debate on the Murray-Darling agreement legislation and said that there may be room for some further extractions but that nevertheless a cap would have to be put in place soon, I do not think even the member envisaged a 60 per cent increase on the extractions

that were around in his day of 550 gigalitres. That is why it has taken some time to bring down the water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne. If we want to talk further about it, I am happy to.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you, Minister; I will do that. Why did the minister get the Condamine-Balonne water resource plan so wrong? Why did the minister and his department not use information of favour to the river? Why did the department's scientists mislead the court? Why did the scientists refuse to do the normally required and proper research? Why was this not done in a fair and reasonable way so that the community could have some faith in what was being done, rather than some dodgy science being made up to make the entitlements fit?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will try to answer all of those questions. It is fair to say that one of the reasons why we found it difficult to bring down a water resource plan for the Condamine-Balonne was because of an approach exactly like the member has taken whereby the member is not really interested in analysing the significant number of studies that have taken place in terms of the ecological health of the river system and wants to play politics with the whole process. What the member has just said is an absolute nonsense.

**Mr HOBBS:** Check the court transcripts.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The department—

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** The government set as a condition of establishing water price benchmarks that the corporatised SunWater would achieve certain cost efficiencies. Will the minister outline SunWater's progress in meeting water reform unit benchmarks and other cost-saving targets?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Since corporatisation SunWater has set out to reduce its unit cost to meet best practice benchmarks. Savings have been made in accommodation costs in Brisbane and the regions. The relocation of the Brisbane officer from Mineral House to the Hall Chadwick Centre will result in saving of some 22 per cent over a seven-year period. In regional areas, SunWater has co-located a number of its offices with existing operational centres to achieve cost savings and improved coordination between managers and operational staff. Further savings were identified following SunWater's review of its motor vehicle needs, including its vehicle leasing arrangements. In the corporate area, a review of information technology networks and support services and procurement and legal services has identified savings of over \$300,000 a year. A similar amount has been saved through efficiencies in the managing of the SunWater gauging station network. SunWater has also achieved savings of 15 per cent in its annual employment costs. These savings have been made through a range of voluntary staff reductions, including an effectively managed voluntary early retirement package.

At the same time, SunWater has reviewed its organisational structure. This has achieved improved customer service through increased management capacity in regional areas. SunWater has actively reviewed its internal business processes and systems in order to provide better information and reduced administrative red tape for both staff and customers. These changes underpin the specific savings I have already mentioned and will ensure that further efficiencies can be achieved. These are pleasing results for me as a shareholding minister of SunWater. Commitments were entered into that savings would be achieved and, of course, the benefits of corporatisation are clearly evident from savings such as this. This provides a good foundation for SunWater to move forward as an efficient and cost-effective water service provider throughout the state.

**Mr POOLE:** Shortly after SunWater became a government owned corporation on 1 October last year it was decided that customer councils should be established to give water users a voice in the management of SunWater supply schemes. Will the minister outline the progress of the formation of these customer councils?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Shortly after SunWater became a government owned corporation in October 2000 the SunWater board and its chief executive officer visited the majority of SunWater schemes throughout the state to discuss with customers the formation of customer councils. During these visits it was agreed that 14 customer councils would be established across the state to provide a formal mechanism through which SunWater and its customers could work together on scheme management issues. To date, 11 of the 14 councils have successfully formed, and one is in the process of forming. However, two councils, Burdekin and Proserpine, are refusing to form because of the dispute over pricing and access to commercial information.

SunWater's management and the formed customer councils have worked hard to develop an effective relationship. In the majority of cases the councils are now functioning well, with individual scheme issues being raised, discussed and resolved in a timely and cooperative manner. In many cases the development of this working relationship has not been easy due to the varying levels of expectation between SunWater and the councils. The appointment of an independent facilitator to assist SunWater and the councils to work together has proved to be an invaluable mechanism in the development of the relationship to date.

Customer councils have been closely involved in current and future management of the schemes through the following mechanisms: an extensive review and discussion on the standard water supply contract between SunWater and customers; development and review of scheme rules for each scheme to document local scheme conditions of supply; close liaison with SunWater on the development of proposed infrastructure operating rules to comply with water resource plan targets for individual schemes; development and review of individual scheme products and services offered by SunWater, including the terms under which products are offered and consultation processes; review of maintenance and future asset renewal programs at the individual scheme level, including detailed discussion on renewal budgets and costings; periodic reporting by SunWater management on scheme issues such as water usage, supply levels, maintenance scheduling, supply restrictions and customer service issues; annual reporting by SunWater to the customer councils on progress towards efficiency targets; and achievement of service targets and scheme outlook. This excellent progress with customer councils was demonstrated at the recent meeting between the SunWater board and council chairs in Brisbane. At this meeting the board and the chairs discussed a variety of issues affecting both SunWater and its customers in an open and cooperative spirit. Feedback from all attendees at the meeting showed that the working relationship has improved greatly over the last 18 months and that all parties are looking forward to continued improvement.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** From 1 July this year SunWater will pay rates on land it holds according to NR&M land valuations backdated to October 2000. Why is this the case, and how much in rates will SunWater pay to Queensland councils?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Government owned corporations are required to pay rates to local government. Rates are already paid on some SunWater land where tenure and valuation issues are clear-cut. These include SunWater's offices and depots utilised for operational and storage purposes. In 2001-02 about \$93,000 was paid to councils for rates on these offices and depots. SunWater holds some 2,500 lots of land associated with its water infrastructure. This is the vast majority of its rateable land holdings. SunWater and the Department of Natural Resources and Mines are in the process of transferring this land from the Crown to SunWater.

The transfer is being progressed in order to put SunWater onto a commercial footing for its land ownership. Given the extent of SunWater's infrastructure, this is a significant process. Legislation requires that land valuation is required in order to determine a rateable value for this land. SunWater and NR&M have completed all processes required for SunWater's land to be rateable from 30 June 2002. All relevant local governments will receive payments for rates from SunWater backdated to 1 October 2000, being SunWater's date of corporatisation. This back payment will total around \$1.3 million. Ongoing rates paid by SunWater are estimated to be about \$760,000 per annum.

**Ms MOLLOY:** What is SunWater doing about the refurbishment and replacement of water infrastructure assets to ensure that standards of service to customers can be maintained?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Maintenance of water services to its 7,500 customers is imperative to SunWater's future as a business. SunWater relies on assets with a current replacement value of \$2.7 billion to deliver these services to customers. Some of SunWater's assets are in excess of 80 years old. As assets age, they require refurbishment or replacement so that standards of service to customers can be maintained. This work, known as renewals, comprises such things as refurbishment of pumps and motors, replacement of pipes, valves and gates and major overhauls of mechanical and electrical equipment. SunWater has reviewed all of its assets and developed programs for renewals work with five-year and 30-year horizons to ensure that the risks associated with asset failure or reduced asset performance over the life of the asset are minimised. This program is periodically reviewed based on assessment of asset condition so that SunWater's annual renewals program is based on asset performance and is cost effective in delivering service outcomes.

In addition to the ongoing renewals program, SunWater has committed to a program to address a number of backlog issues across the state. At the time of SunWater's corporatisation, a

review was undertaken to identify the work required to ensure assets were able to deliver appropriate service standards. As a result of this exercise, about \$26 million of backlog works were identified. This included replacement of assets in poor condition, replacement of obsolete equipment, completion of as-built drawings and work identified in safety inspections. SunWater is committed to the removal of this backlog of works. The cost associated with the backlog program are not recovered in the water prices for irrigators but are funded directly by SunWater from revenue generated in other customer sectors. SunWater has been progressively implementing the backlog program in conjunction with its renewals program and expects to have completed all backlog work by 2005-06.

During 2001-02, SunWater spent over \$14 million on its renewals and backlog programs and has budgeted to spend \$15.7 million in 2002-03. Expenditures will vary from year to year, depending on the timing of replacements for major assets, but some of the major projects scheduled for 2002-03 include pipeline replacement of Claire B3, the Burdekin-Horton water supply scheme of \$1.1 million, the pipeline replacement in the Mareeba-Dimbulah water supply scheme of \$0.4 million, the Ben Anderson Barrage replacement, Bundaberg water supply scheme \$0.24 million, Stanwell pipeline refurbishment \$0.4 million and the Awoonga-Callide pipeline refurbishment of \$0.67 million.

**The CHAIR:** The committee agreed by resolution that questioning on issues related to SunWater finish at 9.20 a.m. As that is now the time, the committee will now consider estimates for the Department of Mines. I believe the advisers are seated.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** They will be soon.

**The CHAIR:** They are on their way. The first round of questions is from non-government members.

**Mr SEENEY:** Note 1 on page 27 of the MPS states that \$1 million in additional output revenue was provided to fund the introduction of model indigenous land use agreements. Note 4 on page 27 states that \$1 million in additional grants was paid to Aboriginal communities to facilitate the introduction of a model for ILUAs. I asked you question on notice No. 375 in parliament, where you said the total cost for the development of these ILUAs was \$967,000. That seems to be in contradiction with the figures provided in the MPS. Could you clear up what the process to develop a statewide ILUA has cost? Is it \$2 million, is it the addition of those two figures, or was the answer that you gave me in the House correct when you said it was \$967,000?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** \$960,000 would have been the figure at that particular point in time.

**Mr SEENEY:** So, from figures given in this budget, the process has cost \$2 million? There is \$1 million that is mentioned in note 1. It says that \$1 million was provided to fund the introduction of a model for ILUAs.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** One figure was development costs, the other one was implementation costs. I will get Geoff Dickie, Executive Director, Native Title Services, to provide further detail for you on that.

**Mr DICKIE:** The development of the statewide ILUA up to the point of signing with the Queensland Indigenous Working Group and the representative bodies around the state was approximately \$250,000 to \$300,000. Getting the statewide ILUA agreed with the individual native title parties is an ongoing process involving meetings with the native title parties, and the total cost that we have budgeted for that is the \$2 million. What we reported in the question on notice was the cost to date. In the costs that we are expending now, we are looking at something like \$600,000 for the roll-out this year—sorry, in the past year, and another equivalent expenditure in the future—in the coming year and in the following year.

**Mr SEENEY:** Correct me if I am wrong, but the figures in the budget documents relate to spending in the year that has passed. It says in the notes that additional grants were paid to Aboriginal communities—note 4—and in note 1 that additional output was provided to fund the introduction of a model. That would appear to me to indicate that that \$2 million has already been spent, and yet you told me in a question on notice that you had only spent \$967,000. There seems to be a contradiction.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will hand that one over to Peter Philipson.

**Mr PHILIPSON:** The first million dollars you referred to is the million dollars that was provided in output revenue to the department. The second note you refer to is the actual estimated expenditure of these funds. So, overall the budget papers indicate we have received a million

dollars for payment of those things. The second note relates to the expenditure—we do not anticipate spending the money again this year.

**Mr SEENEY:** While that may be true, it does not answer the question. The question relates to the fact that you told me you had spent \$967,000 when it is obvious you have actually spent \$2 million.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** No. I do not recall the full details of your question but what you may be getting confused with is the costs of development. I would need to go back to the actual text of your question to determine whether you were talking about development or implementation. That may be the cause of the confusion.

**Mr SEENEY:** Could you confirm for the committee that last year your department spent \$2 million on the ILUA process, whether it was development or implementation or however else you might like to split it up? Can you confirm for the committee that the total cost, based on those figures on page 27 of the MPS in notes 1 and 4, of the ILUA process has been \$2 million? Can you confirm that?

**Mr PHILIPSON:** The amount spent was in the order of a million dollars. As I mentioned before, note 1 refers to the amount of money received or additional appropriation received for that purpose. The second note refers to the expenditure and the fact that we have dropped off by a million dollars in the current year's budget because of the fact that we are not receiving the million dollars again this year. The notes go across all three columns, not just the two.

**Mr SEENEY:** So you are saying the figure was actually \$1 million?

**Mr PHILIPSON:** One million

**Mr SEENEY:** Not \$2 million?

**Mr PHILIPSON:** That is right.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I think what Peter is trying to suggest to you is that the notes that are in that notes column do not necessarily apply to the column that you are referring to. Is that correct?

**Mr PHILIPSON:** Yes. The first note relates to the increase between the 2001-02 budget and the estimated actual, that is, where a million dollars additional was received. It was expended in 2001-02. The second note refers to the expenditure and the fact that in 2002-03 there is a reduction of a million dollars because of the ILUA spent in the previous year.

**Mr SEENEY:** I think, in the interests of time, it might be better if I ask you to take on notice a question of what was the total expenditure on the ILUA process.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sure.

**Mr SEENEY:** You would be happy to do that?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Yes, happy to do that.

**Mr SEENEY:** When can we expect to see a statewide ILUA implemented?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Progress is being made. I can just fill you in with a bit of background. Due to the suspension of processing of exploration permits that was the result of the Wik decision, there is currently a backlog of some 881 exploration permit applications. In August 1999, the Queensland government and the Queensland Indigenous Working Group consulted on a consultation protocol on major policy and legislative issues. One item in the schedule of issues for consultation was obviously the backlog. It was decided to negotiate a model ILUA or Indigenous Land Use Agreement, now referred to as the statewide model, that could be used by native title groups across the state and that would remove the time consuming, costly first step of negotiating agreements with each explorer. The state engaged QWIG in negotiations beginning in February 2000. The negotiations, admittedly, have been protracted as a result of the extensive consultation required. QWIG has consulted extensively with its member bodies and, likewise, its members consulted with their constituents. This consultation was crucial to the ultimate acceptance by the broader indigenous community of the agreement.

The statewide model ILUA was launched jointly by the Premier and QWIG in October last year and the statewide model ILUA is now being implemented across the state. The implementation is being undertaken jointly by my department and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, and QWIG and certain native title representative bodies have also been provided assistance by the Department of Employment and Training and the Environmental Protection Agency.

The implementation program incorporates three stages, the first being the presentation of information sessions to native title groups, the second being the conclusion of authorisation requirements under the Native Title Act by the native title groups, and the final being the registration of the ILUA and the granting of the exploration permits. The purpose of an authorisation meeting is to authorise the application of the statewide model ILUA to a particular area, resulting in the specific area ILUA. To date, 11 authorisation meetings have been held by native title groups, with future meetings to be held. The state is preparing each of the authorised ILUAs for registration with the National Native Title Tribunal.

An example of the use of the statewide model ILUA is the Winton statewide ILUA, which has been completed between the state and the Maiawali and Karuwali people in the Grangulang Council area. This ILUA will allow for the grant of three backlog exploration permits once registered with the national native title tribunal. This is the first model ILUA to reach the stage of being lodged with the tribunal for registration. The registration process with the National Native Title Tribunal will take approximately four months.

**Mr SEENEY:** In dot point 2 on page 23 of the MPS, under the recent achievements for mineral and petroleum exploration, it is stated that the grants for low-impact exploration permits and grants over non-native title land were unaffected by the Federal Court's decision that the alternative state provisions for high-impact exploration and mining were invalid. How many low-impact exploration permits are still waiting to be granted and what is holding up the granting of low-impact exploration permits, if they were unaffected as you claim? What is the reason for the backlog in those low-impact exploration permits?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** They may be unaffected by the Federal Court decision. Nevertheless, that does not mean that they do not have to go through the process of engagement with local indigenous groups. Part of that process involves finding out who the right native title claimants can be in a particular area. Sometimes the process gets held up whilst that has to be clarified. I will provide you with some figures.

As at 30 June 2002, of the 693 applications for exploration permits made since the state provisions commenced, 190 have been granted, comprising 69 grants over land where native title is extinguished, 119 grants for low-impact exploration and two grants for high-impact exploration. Some 277 applications are currently being processed, of which 133 are for high-impact activities, so that only 144 of the total number of outstanding applications can move towards grant. Of the 277 applications, 90 applications have been fully processed. Of the 693 applications lodged since September 2000, 136 have since been abandoned. Therefore, whilst 693 applications have been received, 136 were abandoned or rejected, leaving 557 applications for processing; 190, or 34 per cent, have been granted; and, in addition, a further 90 applications have been fully processed.

I receive a weekly update from the native title section of my department so that I can monitor how negotiations are going with various groups in various areas around the state. That provides me with an opportunity to ensure that there are not unnecessary delays either through bureaucratic processes or the like to ensure that in what is a difficult and challenging area we progress these matters as quickly as possible. But I do emphasise that these are complex issues that require a lot of input and consideration by my department in terms of how we issue permits.

**Mr SEENEY:** The fact remains that low-impact exploration permits are exempt from the right to negotiate. What other reason would there be to hold up the issue of those low-impact exploration permits? Given that you have agreed to have your performance judged by the rate at which these exploration permits are issued—not only in the case of new exploration permits but also the backlog—you must be concerned about the rate at which these low-impact exploration permits are being issued. You must be concerned about the backlog that is developing. What possible reason is there for that go-slow, if you like, within the department, which means that so many of these permit applications are not being processed? Is there any other agreement that the department has reached that could explain that?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I reject that there is any notion of a go-slow in my department whatsoever.

**Mr COULTER:** As the minister just said, 190 applications or grants have been approved. I think one of the concerns is that, while exploration permits have been approved, people are not getting on the land. There has been only a small number of access agreements to that land approved.

**Mr SEENEY:** So it is the access agreements that are the problem?

**Mr COULTER:** Yes, and 10 access agreements have been made in the central and northern region, and another five holders have access because there is no native title party. Sections 488 and 493 of the Mineral Resources Act provide a process to achieve access agreements. This process covers consultation and mediation and, if both parties cannot reach agreement, referral to the Land and Resources Tribunal for a decision. We have estimated that a further 49 holders of granted low-impact exploration permits could have had access agreements by now if they had followed that process, that is, the seven-month period has elapsed and they could have taken that to the Land and Resources Tribunal for determination but that has not happened.

We are not sure what is causing that. It could be because of a lack of commitment or understanding of the process by the exploration industry. It may be that some holders of granted low-impact exploration permits do not currently have the funds or do not wish to proceed with exploration and hence have not pursued access up to this time. That is of concern to the department. What we have done is hold information sessions in Brisbane, Townsville and Mount Isa to explain the process, but it is still a concern that that is not happening. We propose to write to all holders of low-impact exploration permits granted under the ASPs to see why they are not taking those forward and not pursuing those access agreements.

**Mr SEENEY:** Referring again to the Mineral and Petroleum Exploration and Development output on page 23 and in particular the reference to the recent Federal Court decision ruling that your government's alternative state provisions were invalid, I note that the Premier confirmed when announcing the Federal Court's decision that only two mining leases had been granted in the opal fields—I think you confirmed that a moment ago—since those alternative state provisions were enacted on 18 September 2000. Can you confirm that that is because of the Premier's agreement to the federal ALP's introduction in the Senate of a new requirement that access agreements be negotiated before leases are granted, and would you concede that that agreement neutered your government's alternative state provisions and that the mining industry would be far better off under the provisions of the federal government's Native Title Act?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** No, I will not confirm that. It is fair to say that there is a level of frustration currently.

**Mr SEENEY:** That is being caused by these access agreements; can you confirm that much?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The alternative state access agreements provide what we believe to be an easier way to access exploration. You will recall, however, that the proposal that we put forward as a state did not succeed in its entirety through the Senate. So the process that we have is not the process that we originally envisaged. It is fair to say that at a recent lunch with the mining industry the Premier received strong representations from the mining industry that it would like to take an alternative path and use the federal legislation rather than the alternative state provisions. The Premier and I have taken that on board. We have now received a submission from the Queensland Mining Council detailing exactly what it is proposing. That is currently being analysed by my department and I am awaiting a final view as to whether what it is proposing is in fact workable.

We remain flexible in terms of what is in the best interests of the mining industry and indigenous communities in this state. If it is the case that by going down the federal path as proposed by the mining industry in terms of particular sections of that act actually delivering quicker outcomes—if that is the case—that would receive serious consideration by the Queensland government. We are not wedded to saying forever and a day that the alternative state provisions are the be-all and end-all.

**Mr SEENEY:** They have demonstrably failed, have they not?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** No. If there is something that is more workable and time provides you with that advice, we obviously have a responsibility to give that serious consideration. To suggest that it has failed, I think, is incorrect. But I acknowledge that sections of the mining industry do express frustration with it.

**Mr SEENEY:** The figures that we have talked about this morning would indicate that they have failed. Can you confirm that the problem has been those access agreements and that they have really been the hold-up? I think your departmental officers confirmed that a moment ago.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I think the deputy director-general answered that question in some detail.

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

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I note that Native Title Services has been transferred from the Premier's Department to the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. What are the long-term advantages of this move?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Obviously, bringing Native Title Services from Premier's into my department just adds to the spectrum of services that my department can offer across the landscape. The Department of Natural Resources and Mines is about allocating Queensland's natural resources for a variety of purposes. To that extent, it makes sense, given how complex and pervasive native title issues are in this state, that it be brought into my department, because we already have those existing services in the former Department of Mines, which is now the Bureau of Minerals and Petroleum. Native Title Services was brought across from Premier's to the department because we believe that right across the different programs that exist in my department, whether it be water, land allocation, vegetation management—you name it—native title has relevance. Establishing a more lateral approach to how we view the landscape in terms of the issues that challenge all of us is a move that I think will bear fruit into the long term.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 24 of the MPS reference is made to the development of a coal seam gas regime. Will you report on the department's progress in finalising legislative and administrative arrangements for the emergent coal seam gas industry in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This is a matter that has been going on for some time, but I am pleased to say that it is coming to closure. A policy discussion paper outlining a new coal seam gas regime for Queensland was released to stakeholders on 11 March 2002 and the date for the close of submissions was 15 April 2002. Twenty submissions were received from mining, petroleum and other stakeholders.

It is fair to say that across the industry there is not consensus from different parts of the industry on how we should structure legislation, so much so that I became so frustrated with the process that I believed the only way forward was to bring in an independent view rather than respond to, I think, quite unfair and unsubstantiated allegations that parts of my department may be 'captured' by one part of the industry or the other. That is why I established an independent panel chaired by someone known to us all, Frank Clair, QC, the former chair of the Criminal Justice Commission in Queensland, to consider the policy discussion paper and to review the submissions received in accordance with the established terms of reference. During the last two months, the panel has undertaken this review and has also met with relevant industry bodies. The panel will provide its report to me shortly and I will consider its recommendations.

The resolution of a coal seam gas regime has been a difficult process, as it is a complex issue. For example, two industries with overlapping existing rights and disparate views on how it should be resolved exist. However, with the release of the February 2002 policy discussion paper and the imminent report of the independent panel, it is my intention to finalise the regime and allow the legislative drafting and implementation process to proceed as soon as possible. Implementation of the new regime will allow explorers and developers to invest in coal seam gas projects with certainty and allow greater access to the state's potentially huge coal seam gas resources.

**Mr POOLE:** I refer to the department's internationally recognised Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station, also known as SIMTARS, mentioned on page 1. Can you outline whether Queensland is exporting its mine safety technology to other countries?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The department's Safety in Mines Testing and Research Station, or SIMTARS, is involved in the export of services and import replacement services in India, China, the USA and various other countries. I will touch on some of the highlights of this work because it really is a good news story. SIMTARS formed a joint venture with two private sector companies to deliver training and technology to Indian mines inspection officials under the AusAID contract with the Commonwealth Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. As part of the project, scientific instrumentation for the monitoring and interpretation of the gaseous atmospheres of underground coalmines was provided and commissioned. The equipment provides early detection of potentially disastrous hazards and makes a significant contribution to the saving of lives and the mining resource. Occupational hygiene monitoring equipment was also supplied.

Mine emergency procedures were developed in consultation with the Indian officials and emergency exercises were conducted to test their effectiveness. Both AusAID and the Indian government were pleased with the results in the project, which was originally intended to run for three years and was extended for a further year to cover additional requirements initiated by the Indian government. This project was completed in December last year. The SIMTARS staff who

visited Indian mines gained valuable experience in dealing with mine heating and fires, as these situations are encountered with much less frequency in Queensland because of the safety technology and safety regimes in place here.

In China SIMTARS has attracted some interest from mining officials and mining companies because of the safety technology available from SIMTARS. China is a major coal producer and is reputed to have some 10,000 mining related deaths each year. In fact, just over the last couple of weeks we heard of two significant disasters that claimed hundreds of lives in Chinese mines. Reciprocal visits over the past years have increased understanding and heightened interest in SIMTARS gas monitoring technology, and it is anticipated that some business may be conducted in the near future. This is of benefit to the Queensland mining industry as the development cost of the technology can be recovered from a wider customer base and the experience gained from matching the technology to the Chinese requirements will add to the SIMTARS expertise in this field.

In the USA an underground coalmine in New Mexico has contracted SIMTARS to install a gas monitoring and interpretation system and work is anticipated to commence in late 2003. SIMTARS has also provided contract occupational hygiene and environmental services to companies located in PNG, Fiji, New Zealand and the Philippines. In the 2001-02 financial year, SIMTARS also sold a package of highly specialised electrical testing equipment to a South Korean gas company. This, as I said, is a good news story for Queensland. I look forward to seeing continuing successes by SIMTARS in exporting its world-leading technology overseas.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Page 1 of the MPS states that exploration investment is critical to maintaining the strength and growth of the Queensland mining industry. What initiatives is the department undertaking in 2002-03 to attract more investment?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** A report recently completed by ACIL Consulting for my department shows that the mining and minerals processing sectors currently contribute around 10.2 per cent of gross state product or about \$9.4 billion per year in Queensland. Together, Queensland's mining and minerals processing industries directly and indirectly generate almost 93,000 full-time equivalent jobs throughout Australia. My department is well aware that without exploration there will be no mines for the future. Additional funding of \$9.2 million—or \$5 million for native title processing and \$4.2 million for exploration attraction—over four years has been provided to support a number of projects aimed at encouraging further exploration investment.

An Information and Liaison Unit will be established within Industry Development in the new Bureau of Mining and Petroleum to assist in addressing circumstances that affect Queensland's exploration and mining industries. Some \$1.9 million has been allocated for the current native title program for minerals and petroleum tenures to continue to negotiate and implement ILUAs and other native title processes under the Commonwealth Native Title Act for mining activities. The Kalkadoon ILUA registered in May 2002 for 58 exploration permits for minerals is now being implemented with the exploration companies in north-west Queensland and the Kalkadoon people. Ten native title groups have authorised the statewide model ILUA and the ILUA has been submitted to the National Native Title Tribunal for registration ready for explorers to deed into. My department also provides geological maps and reports, geoscience data compiled into databases, GIS packages and airborne geophysical and gravity survey data to actively promote and enhance the state's prospectivity. The acquisition of airborne geophysical data and the distribution of geoscience and company report information via current and proposed Internet based applications exemplifies my department's commitment to applying the latest technology in support of exploration attraction.

My department commenced a project in 2001-02 to develop an Internet based application for the online lodgement and retrieval of exploration company reports in digital format. The new system, known as QDEX, plans to provide the capability to lodge and retrieve reports through the Internet and eventually store all company reports in digital format. The project's target date of having the new system in production is late in 2002. This will provide companies wishing to undertake exploration with unparalleled access to the vast amount of data within the department. A new airborne geophysical survey will also be released over a 15,000 square kilometre region of the northern Bowen Basin in central Queensland, which was flown earlier this year. The data presented in the north-west Queensland mineral province study will also be a fundamental building block for research, which will channel the collective capability of industry, academia and government towards predicting where to find the next generation of world-class mines.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, the MPS mentions on page 25 that there are plans to further examine the development of as yet undeveloped coal deposits in the Surat/Dawson Basin. What

progress is the department making in determining ways in which these rich untapped coal reserves can be developed?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The undeveloped coal deposits in the southern Bowen Basin at Theodore and Dawson and the northern Surat Basin at Wandoan and Taroom contain significant reserves of thermal coal amenable to open-cut mining. The southern Bowen Basin coals are typical of Queensland export thermal coals. Whilst the Surat Basin coals have a relatively low energy yield compared to Australian thermal coal standards, they also produce relatively low emissions. The low emission properties of Walloon coal suggest the possibility that the coals could gain a share of a developing post-Kyoto, greenhouse-friendly niche market. The departments of Natural Resources and Mines and State Development have been examining ways in which the thermal coal reserves in the southern Bowen and northern Surat basins can be developed.

Early in 2002 DSD and NR&M completed preliminary work to determine the longer term market, demand and supply, prospects and indicative capital and operating costs of potential mines at Theodore, Dawson, Taroom and Wandoan. The results of these studies indicate that there are niche market opportunities that can be pursued by facilitating early development of the Theodore and Wandoan deposits in the first instance. However, infrastructure constraints, particularly rail and water, have the potential to hinder early development of these deposits. My department and DSD have been working collaboratively with resource owners, Anglo Coal/Mitsui, Theodore, Dawson and Taroom, MIM and Wandoan, to set up a joint government industry group to assess, among other things, infrastructure options, constraints and opportunities and the extent to which these will have an impact on the commercial viability of potential mines. Officers from Anglo/Mitsui and MIM have been represented in preliminary meetings of a small support group to finalise the terms of reference, tasks and deliverables of the joint government-industry group.

The group's first task will be to oversight a rail infrastructure consultancy that will assess options and constraints for a rail link from the undeveloped reserves to the port of Gladstone. This group will also oversight assessment of water and electricity requirements. If these assessments indicate that development of infrastructure is feasible and that mine development is commercially viable, the group may then go on to identify and quantify various infrastructure funding strategies. I am sure that the member for Callide is probably interested in this because most of this is in his electorate, if I understand correctly. So the work is going on to identify infrastructure requirements and obviously do the necessary assessments to allow it to occur.

The Cooperative Research Centre for Coal in Sustainable Development is conducting scientific research into the performance of Queensland coals and has extensive knowledge and research capability in emerging combustion technologies, such as pressurised fluidised bed and gasification, compared with conventional pulverised fuel technologies. The work of CCSD has the potential to assist in marketing Surat Basin coals in view of Japan's recent adoption of Kyoto principles. NR&M and DSD will actively monitor the ongoing work of the Cooperative Research Centre for Coal in Sustainable Development.

**Mr POOLE:** On page 3 the MPS says that the government has provided additional funding to the explosives inspectorate. What action is the inspectorate taking to crack down on the illegal sale of fireworks in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Although the home use of fireworks was prohibited in Queensland in 1972, they remain available to the public at certain times of the year mainly through the ACT and the Northern Territory. In Queensland fireworks may only be used at public displays by those trained and licensed to use them. However, there are those in the community who, with scant regard for public safety, will supply fireworks illegally to unauthorised persons. This is not only a Queensland problem; the problem exists in most states of Australia as the mark-up available on cheap Chinese fireworks is indeed high. A recent tragedy in Victoria at the beginning of June this year highlighted the risk associated with these fireworks when a 16-year-old youth was killed attempting to initiate a firework that had been procured illegally.

Steps have been taken in Queensland to address this issue, including liaison between the explosives inspectorate and the Queensland Police Service to ensure police have all the necessary powers to address illegal fireworks issues under the Police Powers and Responsibilities Act; positive support and assistance in pursuing prosecutions for breaches of the Explosives Act in relation to fireworks, and there have been 56 prosecutions in the last 12 months; reviewing the new explosives regulation to include steps to minimise the illegal trade in fireworks; prevention of advertisements for fireworks via the media or the Internet; and supporting the national call to have

fireworks added to the Customs prohibited import list so that state authorities can be alerted to incoming fireworks.

I should say that what disappoints me in relation to that last point is that we have failed to secure the support of the federal government in adding fireworks to the Customs prohibited imports list. That would have enabled more regular inspections by Customs of, for example, containers coming in over the wharves for fireworks. For whatever reason, the federal minister—Minister Abbott I think it is—has failed to support this initiative which is supported by all states. This is a matter of great disappointment. As a result, the fight to reduce the amount of illegal fireworks coming in across our wharves is diminished by his lack of commitment. I must say that his cursory response to submissions and correspondence put to him indicates a less than full appreciation of the dangers of illegal fireworks coming into this country. I only hope that wiser heads will prevail in the federal government and we get some sense from it in terms of adding fireworks to that Customs prohibited imports list.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The committee will now adjourn for morning tea. The hearing will resume at 10.15 a.m. to continue the examination of the portfolio of Natural Resources and Mines.

Sitting suspended from 9.57 a.m. to 10.15 a.m.

**The CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee E hearing is now resumed. Again, I welcome the minister and representatives from the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Callide.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, on page 9 of the MPS reference is made to the signing of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality on 1 March 2002. It is interesting to note that this is one of only three times in the whole MPS that the word 'salinity' is mentioned. Last week you released a salinity hazard map for the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin which, in your media release on 10 July, you said was not intended to replace on-the-ground local and site specific environmental impact assessments but rather provides an assessment of the potential for salinity problems to arise in the landscape. Minister, how much funding have you committed in this budget this year to conduct the necessary on-the-ground local and site specific environmental impact assessments?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** A major priority for my department is of course the implementation of the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality—or NAP, as it is more commonly known—which is jointly funded between the federal government and ourselves. We signed that agreement on 1 March 2002. Implementation of the plan will be primarily through regional bodies preparing catchment and regional natural resource management plans with targets based on sound science and community input. The state is currently developing a package of projects for approval jointly by the Commonwealth and state under the NAP. This package is estimated to cost a total of \$5.76 million in 2002-03 and \$16.54 million over the life of the program.

The package will provide information and data and the science necessary to assess the impacts of land management and use practices on salinity and water quality. This will enable Queensland to rapidly progress to quantify the impacts of land, water and vegetation management on catchment salt, sediment and nutrient loads. This is essential scientific information to support the setting of targets and the preparation and implementation of natural resource management plans by regional communities in the national action plan priority region.

The work that goes on and, therefore, the allocation that is made in these budget proposals represents the nature of the agreement between ourselves and the Commonwealth. That is why you see a ramping up of allocations over the seven-year period. You just do not cut the \$162 million into seven equal parts; there is a lot of capacity building that necessarily needs to go on—obviously getting regional groups in place. That is why, in the early years, you would have less than the average annual allocation put into budgets. But as those regional groups get up and running, their plans are in place and their action agendas set, you see the increase in expenditure come through in forthcoming years as a result.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, with respect, you did not answer the question. I asked how much money was allocated in this budget for your government's reaction to the salinity problem. The only figure I can find is published in the budget highlights that you put out, which give a figure of \$3.997 million. You say that that is to be spent on the first year of a seven-year national action plan; but I note that the figure appears to be an amalgam of NR&M, the EPA, the DPI and local government. I ask you again: how much money is specifically allocated by your department in this budget for pursuing the issue of salinity? How much money have you allocated to groundtrutting

the maps that you launched last week with such fanfare? How much money have you specifically allocated to the issue?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Under the area of national action plan science support, the budget is \$2.85 million in 2002-03 for science support and \$2.91 million for science support in the water quality package.

**Mr SEENEY:** How much money have you allocated to groundtruthing the maps?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** We cannot break down the budget to that extent, but what I have indicated in terms of science support under the national action plan is \$2.85 million this year.

**Mr SEENEY:** Will you guarantee to the committee that those maps will be groundtruthed in the coming year?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is the next level. You have done the salinity hazard map, which was released. You then move to the next phase, which is salinity risk. Part of that process is obviously groundtruthing. But groundtruthing is going on at the present time. We have a program of sinking bores in high-risk areas to monitor the behaviour of aquifers and water quality, et cetera—that preparatory work. I guess that eventually you get to the stage of property identification on a property by property basis or a catchment or subcatchment basis of the actual salinity risk. So you roll out that program as your science develops, and that will in fact occur.

**Mr SEENEY:** I am pleased to hear you say that, Minister. It is quite a different impression from what you and the Premier created in the media with your sensationalised statements about salinity eating the railway lines and all the rest of it.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will respond to that. What we did on Tuesday or Wednesday last week was take a very responsible line. By bringing in all the major stakeholders, we gave them a detailed briefing on the science underpinning that map. We said constantly, 'This is not about causing panic in south-west Queensland.' Nevertheless, because this was a map that was developed under the national action plan, it had to be released. As part of the bilateral agreement with the Commonwealth, that map would have been released by the federal government anyway. What we tried to do was take a responsible approach by releasing it now, briefing all the major stakeholders on the science underpinning it and indicating the time frames that are part of that hazard mapping process. We did not take an irresponsible line. It was not our purpose to cause panic in south-west Queensland.

I made the point—and I have made it publicly—that as part of the roll-out of this map I will be engaging with the finance industry so that they are properly informed about what that hazard map actually represents and the science that underpins it so that they do not take pre-emptive action against land-holders and use that map as an excuse to foreclose on people. I am very serious when I talk about that, because it does concern me that elements in the finance industry may get up to a bit of mischief like that, and I want to stop that happening to the extent that I can by ensuring that they are properly engaged and informed.

**Mr SEENEY:** I welcome your comments, Minister, but I make the point again that that is a different impression from what was portrayed last week.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You know how the media is.

**Mr SEENEY:** What I am trying to get from you now is an assurance that, within this budget document that we are examining today, there are funds allocated to continue that responsible approach, to continue with that next step that you spoke about—moving from a point of identifying a salinity hazard to identifying and quantifying the risk. I asked you before about funds for groundtruthing. The other essential element, I would suggest, is to map the areas of rising ground water, because that is what is required to turn salt in the landscape into a salinity issue. Are there funds in this budget document—and can you show me where those funds are available—to carry out that essential work to move from the first step that you have spoken about of identifying the salinity hazard to the next step of identifying and quantifying the salinity risk?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The reason you cannot find a specific allocation is because that work is spread across a range of programs. For example, some of the work that the regional vegetation management committees are doing is part of that groundtruthing.

**Mr HOBBS:** Take a guess.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not in the business of taking guesses. I do not run my budgets like the National Party does. This work is spread across a range of different programs. I might just ask

Scott Spencer to fill you in with the details of the actual work that will be undertaken over the next 12 months.

**Mr SPENCER:** We have a number of programs under way. We have recently done some work on ground water levels across the state. As part of the announcement that the minister and Mr Kemp agreed to under a national action plan, there is quite a bit of salinity hazard risk assessment to take place over the next four years of the national action plan, not just in the Condamine-Balonne but in the other priority regions. That will include ground water drilling. The point that Mr Seeneey made is quite right. We need to look at that rising ground water table issue, and we are doing that as part of this program.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, would it not have been appropriate to have done that work in concert so that we avoided the reaction that we saw last week? You blamed the media for sensationalising it. I put it to you that someone more cynical might suggest that it was an attempt to achieve a panic response to the water resource planning problems in the Condamine-Balonne.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** When you talk about a cynical person I know that you are not referring to yourself, of course. The thing that challenges government, but not in a negative way—when you are serious about engaging local communities in the development of plans, necessarily they need to share in the information. This map has been in existence now for a number of months. In fact, some of the more cynical people to whom you are perhaps referring were telling us that it was the worst kept secret around the place. Because of the extent of community engagement that we undertook there was widespread knowledge in the general stakeholder community about the existence of this. That is inevitable if you are serious about community engagement. So the release of the map last week was something that was always scheduled.

There was one thing that we were cautious about—and the Premier referred to it. When I first saw the map and took it to the Premier and talked to him about it, quite properly he said, 'Prove to me that it is correct. Get this checked.' So even after the map had in fact been produced and people had seen it, we then undertook a form of peer review involving the CRC for freshwater ecology—the CSIRO, I beg your pardon—to have the science underpinning that map checked. That is why there were some months between its actual production and its formal release, because we wanted to check it. The information that we wanted to put out to the community had to be correct.

Based on our learning from the water resource plan in the Condamine-Balonne, we did not want to go down the path of having science questioned without having it checked by a reputable body such as the CSIRO. I think we have done the very responsible thing. The time line that you have suggested—whereby people may view in a cynical way that it was a panic release—is not the case; it just reflects our own time lines in having that map checked and having to release it because it would have been released anyway by virtue of having to give it to the federal government as part of the bilateral agreement we have under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality.

**Mr SEENEY:** Did you carry out any groundtruthing at all before you released it as part of that effort to ensure that the Premier could be assured that it was correct? Did you carry out any groundtruthing?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** If that is your question then you fundamentally misunderstand what the salinity hazard map actually represents.

**Mr SEENEY:** The point I am making is that the public at large misunderstand it because of the way you handled it.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The next stage, as Scott Spencer has outlined, is actually the groundtruthing process. A week before I stood down in the Executive Building with David Kemp announcing \$13.5 million as the next allocation under the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality, which was actually about getting the money across government—not just myself but the EPA, et cetera—to go down the path of the next step to provide further verification of the salinity risk in this state.

In terms of groundtruthing, so far 135 new bores have been drilled using Natural Heritage Trust money. It is difficult to come up with a total figure in the budget for this work because it is spread across a range of programs. So 135 new bores have been drilled using NHT funding and a further 35 have been drilled using NAP money. Most of the bores will be used for long-term monitoring. A further 20 bores will be drilled using NHT funding, and 60 more bores will be drilled in the Lower Balonne using NAP funding.

The results of these investigations, together with data from existing monitoring bores, are being published on maps which provide the regional community with up-to-date pictures on shallow ground water systems. It is intended that such maps will cover the Condamine, Border Rivers, Maranoa, Balonne and Warrego catchments. This information will provide benchmarks that regional natural resource management bodies can use in setting ground water targets.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, is it true to say that the salinity maps you released the other day are in fact a hypothetical assumption based on land types and vegetation and were those maps done 100 years ago they would be the same?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The maps do not monitor land use change, hence the comment that was made by Ian Todd at the briefing with the Premier and me the other day. Mike Horan wrote to me some time ago requesting a briefing on salinity. We were not in a position to provide that briefing because it was a matter going before cabinet. I am happy to provide the scientific briefing underpinning the salinity hazard maps at a time convenient to the members for Warrego and Callide and their leader.

The scientific methods used to develop the salinity hazard map have been independently reviewed by leading scientists including the CSIRO, the national land and water resources audit, Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Australia, the Department of Land and Water Conservation in New South Wales and the Western Australian Department of Agriculture. The methods used have been confirmed as a sound basis for representing those parts of the landscape which are most sensitive to land use change and thus with the greatest potential to develop salinity.

Given the current available spatial data sets in Queensland, a composite index approach has been used to provide a sound framework for the representation of potential for salt mobilisation, or salinity hazard, in Queensland landscapes. This approach uses expert knowledge to integrate existing data, experience and other relevant information into a spatial representation of the key landscape attributes associated with salinity.

I will not be critical of the approach the member for Warrego is taking, but I think it is time people got out of their state of denial. This map is sea change in terms of our approach to landscape management in this state. To date all of us have said that Queensland does not have the problems of salinity that the southern states have. This map tells us that unless we take action now we will, whether it be in 30 years or 50 years. If current land use practices continue in the long term we might actually see a compression of those time frames.

We cannot ignore this science. We need to take the precautionary approach. I am not having a shot at the National Party in particular, but it is time the political posturing stopped, because it is actually not a political argument. It is actually an argument about Queensland's future. That is what we need to take on board. I invite the opposition to come on board and be engaged in this process, because we will be doing the right thing by all of our constituents in the long term.

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, I certainly agree with the latter part of your comment at least. To be honest, I am somewhat gratified this morning at the understanding and explanations you have been able to give the committee. That is a very different impression from the one created by the way the salinity maps were released. It is a very different impression from the one you have created in the general community. Was there a deliberate intent to make that impression as part of the government's solution to the water resource planning issues within the Condamine-Balonne system or has that wrong impression been created in the community simply by neglect?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Neither. We are committed to engaging the community in a full and open way.

**Mr SEENEY:** The Premier talked about salinity eating the railway lines, undermining St George, collapsing Dirranbandi and all the rest of the stupid sensationalism that went on.

**The CHAIR:** Order! I remind the member for Callide that under sessional order 25 the member is to ask a question and not make a speech. Minister, please continue.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** What the Premier talked about was the insidious consequences of salinity expression. Those of us who know a bit about this stuff only need to go to Wagga Wagga to see salt creeping through the brickwork of people's homes. People only need to go to some parts of the electorate of the member for Warrego to see salt expressed on roadways and causing damage to roads as we speak. We only need to go to other parts of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin where salt is currently being expressed to see the damage to the landscape and

the resulting death of vegetation and erosion that occurs as a result of a landscape being denuded by salt.

Nothing the Premier said was irresponsible. It is a wake-up call for everyone to understand that unless we take some hard decisions now our future is what we see in the Murray-Darling, in South Australia and in parts of New South Wales, where millions and millions of dollars of taxpayers' money is spent on salt extraction works—getting salt out of the landscape. The Premier's wake-up call is a timely and appropriate one. People should heed what the Premier has said, because that will be our future. That will be our future in towns that have a high potential for salinity to be expressed over time. Nothing the Premier said was irresponsible or incorrect. I can only support what he said, because it is a wake-up call for all of us.

**Mr SEENEY:** Then allocate some money. There is no money in the budget for it.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is why we have signed up to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality—\$162 million over this year and the next six years. Unless the federal government wants to slash NHT, which is increasingly likely, that is where funding will be made available now for the first time ever in Queensland by this government to fight salinity in our landscape.

**Mr SEENEY:** How much?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** \$162 million over seven years.

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, what is the scientific basis of the view that the Condamine-Balonne river system will degrade if no action is taken to address water diversions and provide for long-term river health?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you for that question. I did not have the chance to complete my answer to a similar question asked earlier by members opposite. It is something we really need to put to rest. We listened and took on board the outcomes of the court case that was referred to earlier, a court case we judiciously retired from. As a result of that we took on board the recommendations and outcomes of the evidence portrayed during that court case. I ask the committee to look at this document, entitled *Water resource planning: the science behind it*. I think it is worth while reading part of this document into the record. It states—

The issue of scientific uncertainty was central to a recent water licence appeal in the Land Court, which has attracted some commentary in the media.

Although the parties involved in this case reached an agreed settlement prior to the Court making any decision, experts involved in both sides of the case highlighted some technical issues that warrant further attention.

These include:

the need to apply nationally accepted ecological sampling protocols and assessment procedures. These protocols guide how specific ecological data (such as fish and macroinvertebrates) are sampled, assessed and reported. By following these protocols (for sampling analysis of macroinvertebrates, and the "IBI Index of Integrity" for other biological indicators such as fish), scientists can assess the condition of the environment and compare conditions at different locations and time. Work is under way to ensure that sampling and assessments consistently adhere to these protocols.

the need to recognise the inherent uncertainties associated with hydrologic modelling, particularly with respect to the input data and assumptions. As an example, the implications of flow gauging inaccuracies and the effects of land clearing on river flows need to be assessed and quantified.

One of the interesting things that came out of that court case was the view that, as a result of the significant amount of land clearing that had gone on in the Lower Balonne, there was actually more water in the system than might have been considered otherwise. What a fantastic outcome! You clear the vegetation so that all of the trees are gone, and as a result in flooding events more water makes it into the river system. And that is a good thing! And that is water that should be further taken up for the development of properties! I cannot imagine any more twisted logic than that. The document continues—

While acknowledging the uncertainties noted above, scientists from both sides—

I understand that one is in town at the moment—

agree that:

the Department's hydrologic modelling is the best presently available for assessing impacts.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, government water planning, mentioned on page 8, allows for water trading under the Water Act 2000 by which water entitlements are separated from land. Can you provide a progress report on water trading in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This is a very complex issue and one I have paid a lot of attention to. Under the COAG water reforms of 1994, one of the reforms state governments are being asked to put in place is a regime for water trading. I guess in principle one would say that is a good thing. The principle of water going to its highest and best use is something that achieves better economic outcomes for rural areas. But when you drill down into the issue of water trading a range of issues challenge us in terms of setting the correct parameters, to ensure not only the ecological health but also the socioeconomic health of rural communities. I acknowledge concern in some parts of Queensland that the shifting of water from one area to the next, where it is hydrologically possible, may in fact shift with it significant wealth from one community to another.

We have conducted some trials up in the Tablelands and in the irrigation scheme at St George. We are about to start some trials in the Border Rivers area—along the weir, if I remember rightly. This will enable us to build up a sense of the full impacts of going to a water trading regime.

I know that some of the concerns I have mentioned are also shared by some parts of the National Party. Whilst we endorse the principle of water trading, the actual rules that will apply need to be formulated in a way which is sensitive to the particular landscape we are referring to. One size will not fit all in establishing water trading regimes.

My department is committed to establishing those rules. I think the secret behind it will be full and open engagement with local communities. There is a lot of anticipation about water trading but there is a degree of nervousness as well. We need to get the rules right to ensure that people are settled in approaching water trading as another mechanism to achieve sustainability in farming enterprises across the various landscapes in Queensland.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, enhanced monitoring and research into river health is a key component of water reform mentioned on page 2. Can you outline what work the department is doing to monitor the health of waterways in the Moreton Bay catchment?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** We have provided \$400,000 in this year's budget to the Moreton Bay Waterways and Catchment Partnership. That partnership, which was formerly the Brisbane River Management Group, is focused on the health of south-east Queensland's waterways, both marine and fresh water. To underpin planned management actions, the partnership identified the need to establish an ongoing water quality monitoring program called the ecosystem health monitoring program. The initial focus of that program was on sewage discharges and the related impacts on Moreton Bay and adjoining estuaries.

Since 1999, the EPA has undertaken extensive monitoring of sewage plumes, seagrass health, chemical water quality and benthic metabolism in the bay and estuaries for the partnership as an in-kind contribution valued at \$700,000 per annum. The region's coastal local governments also contribute \$580,000 per annum for sample analysis data, management and reporting. The local governments' contribution also offsets their requirements to monitor water quality for their sewage discharge licences issued under the Environmental Protection Act.

The second phase of the program is focused on diffuse sources of pollution, that is, nutrient and sediment, which impact on the health of the region's freshwater streams. That is where my department has a keen interest in this particular program, because we are now starting to look at the land based impacts on the health of Moreton Bay. In 2000, expert scientists engaged by the partnership proposed that macro invertebrates, chemical water quality, fish, benthic metabolism and algae be measured at 120 sites on small streams across the region. The partnership has estimated that the proposal would cost \$810,000 per annum to operate and has sought contributions from all local governments, the South East Queensland Water Corporation and my department.

We have responsibility for the management of non-tidal waters, vegetation and land, all of which impact on stream health. We have agreed to contribute \$400,000 per annum for the next four years to help establish the program in its initial stage and to allow the regional community via local government, water boards, et cetera to gradually pick up the full cost of the program. Information from the program will be used by the partnership and its stakeholders to guide awareness education and restoration activities in the respective catchments and streams. The information may also contribute to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality in the region.

This initiative is just another example of the broad responsibilities of my department. Too often natural resource management issues are considered to be simply rural issues. The fact is that the welfare of all Queenslanders is influenced by how well our natural resources are

managed. Our involvement with the Moreton Bay Waterways and Catchment Partnership is a clear example of our work in an urbanised setting.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 14 of the MPS it is stated that the government's rural water use efficiency initiative is on track to meet its stated objectives. Can the minister outline these targets and say whether this initiative has been embraced by rural industries in Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This is a great story. The rural water use efficiency initiative that was established by my predecessor, Rod Welford, is delivering real outcomes for rural land-holders who need and live by the use of water. The program was launched in May 1999. It is a true partnership between industry and government to improve the use and management of available irrigation water, thereby improving the competitiveness, profitability and environmental sustainability of Queensland's rural industries.

Over four years to June 2003, up to \$41 million will be spent on this initiative. This initiative is being delivered in partnership with the sugar, cotton and grain, fruit and vegetable, and dairy, lucerne and pasture industries. The initiative is on target to achieve an annual increase in agricultural production of \$280 million by June 2003. This is equivalent to what would have been achieved by annually supplying an additional 180,000 megalitres of irrigation water. This increased production is being achieved by higher levels of adoption of best management irrigation practices on farms. An additional 1,600 jobs will be created as a result of this initiative by June 2003.

In January 2001, the Premier announced the commencement of 10 research and development projects investing a total of \$2.8 million to provide specific support for rural industries. Simultaneously, he announced the financial incentive scheme to distribute up to \$12 million to Queensland irrigators to assist in improving irrigation systems and their management. Approximately 3,500 applications under the scheme have been approved to date with \$6.12 million in funding provided. A further \$3.5 million will be available to irrigators under the financial incentives scheme in 2002-03. Under the scheme, irrigators are spending approximately \$3 for every \$1 contributed by the government.

In 2002-03, we will provide a further \$3.5 million in financial assistance to irrigators, which will lead to further significant investments in improving the irrigation systems and productivity. Irrigator participation in the program is running at exceptionally high levels with approximately 80 per cent of irrigators involved in field days, demonstrations and other events run by the program.

The impacts of the program are best demonstrated by providing a few examples. For example, in the fruit and vegetable industry, over 50 per cent of irrigators have made improvements to their irrigation systems. In the sugar industry, the level of adoption of best management practice in the Burdekin region has risen from seven per cent to 56 per cent. In the cotton industry, irrigators are typically making improvements in water use efficiency of 20 per cent through fairly simple changes in management practices. In the dairy industry, 200 farmers' irrigation systems have been checked for distribution uniformity. Under other activities this year, we will be increasing efforts to address losses from evaporation from storages, which can account for up to between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of losses in the cotton industry.

**Mr POOLE:** Page 2 of the MPS highlights an extra \$9 million over two years in Queensland government funding for the Great Artesian Basin sustainability initiative. Can the minister outline the success to date of this initiative and comment on whether Queensland is meeting its financial commitments to GABSI?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This is a program that I have taken a very special interest in, because it is one of those programs, like the rural water use efficiency scheme, that is actually delivering real outcomes in terms of how we manage valuable natural resources like water. In June 2000, the Queensland government signed an agreement with the Commonwealth to jointly fund, together with land-holder contributions, the Great Artesian Basin sustainability initiative, or GABSI. Works eligible for participation in the initiative are those bores that were constructed prior to 1954 and those post-1954 bores with highly corrosive water.

The problem is that bores have been sunk in the Great Artesian Basin for well over 100 years—I think dating back to the 1860s. A lot of those bores are free flowing; they cannot be turned off. Over time, because of the nature of the water coming out of them, they corrode. As a result, we have spilling out over the landscape literally millions of litres of water from the Great Artesian Basin, which then result in a whole range of other natural resource challenges such as weed control and there is some suggestion that kangaroo numbers are increased as a result of their access to permanent water provided by the channels created by these free-flowing bores.

The other problem was, for those land-holders who rely on their bores to provide water, they were suffering falling pressure. As a result, this program was created to provide funding to cap a lot of these free-flowing bores and pipe the bores as well, so the water that is actually coming out of ground can be used in a far more sustainable and efficient way.

In 2001-02 alone, the initiative replaced some 1,040 kilometres of bore drains generating additional water savings of around 10,000 megalitres per annum. We have capped about 80 of the bores and replaced over 1,900 kilometres of bore drains since inception. So overall we are saving about 23,000 megalitres per annum. My department's efforts in undertaking GABSI have been effective, with pressure increases of up 30 per cent resulting from the capping and piping of some bores in priority areas. Overall, my department has capped 450 bores and piped over 90 schemes since 1989 under various programs. The total estimated water savings from these activities is in excess of 70,000 megalitres per annum. That is why this year we are increasing our contribution to the scheme from \$2.55 million to \$4.55 million. We leverage off that dollar-for-dollar funding from the Commonwealth, which then goes into providing assistance to land-holders to cap those old bores and provide piping assistance for their drains network.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Queensland's vegetation management laws appear to be having an effect on reducing tree clearing. How does the department ensure compliance? How many notifications of illegal clearing has the department dealt with?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The resources provided in this year's budget of some \$560,000 for compliance demonstrates the government's ongoing commitment to the enforcement of Queensland's vegetation management laws. The unpredictable nature of prosecutions makes it difficult to set a compliance budget. A fully contested case may cost the state tens of thousands of dollars whereas a plea of guilty may cost very little. As I have previously emphasised, the government encourages a cooperative approach with land-holders and the wider community to achieve good vegetation management outcomes. However, the strong message that the government has sent is that those who clear trees without a valid permit will be prosecuted.

Since the creation of a full-time compliance unit in April 2001, my department has received more than 450 notifications of alleged illegal clearing. By 30 May 2002, 266 notifications had been investigated and finalised. More than 190 investigations are still under way. There are currently nine cases before the courts. During 2001-02, there were 11 successful prosecutions of vegetation clearing offences. My department has compliance officers located throughout the state with the coordinator located in Brisbane. The compliance capacity will be further increased this year with the appointment of regional compliance coordinators in each region.

During 2001-02, the emphasis was on providing investigative skills training to compliance officers and preparing the manuals, policies and procedures necessary to facilitate the enforcement of the state's vegetation management laws. The department has gone to considerable lengths to ensure that it has a consistent, fair and accountable enforcement regime. This year, the focus will be on developing and introducing an automated case management system to facilitate faster and more efficient investigations. Penalty infringement notices will also be introduced, further reducing the need to prosecute.

Not all cases end in prosecution. In some cases, it is more efficient—and, I think, appropriate—to order land-holders to restore the cleared area at their own expense. There are currently 17 cases involving remediation of illegally cleared vegetation. Information obtained from the compliance unit is being used to target ongoing education campaigns that it is hoped will ultimately reduce the need for enforcement.

**Mr SEENEY:** I refer to question on notice No. 4 in regard to the current vacancies in the Department of Natural Resources and Mines. In the table that you have provided it appears that the department now has a staggering 172 vacancies. Out of those 172, by my count at least, more than 20 vacancies are directly involved with the water reform process. They include a director of water planning, which has been vacant for almost six months; five senior policy officers in the water reform area; as well as a principal scientist and a scientist in water quality assessment. With your department carrying so many vacancies, especially in the water reform unit, how has this hampered the department's ability to implement water reform plans on time and accurately.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is an interesting spin, since most of the positions had been vacant only since May or June. I will get Rob Freeman to answer in some detail the breakdown of those figures.

**Mr FREEMAN:** It is difficult to answer that question generally because, as you are aware, the department has a fairly dynamic agenda and, therefore, has a fairly dynamic work force. Normally, what happens when a position becomes vacant is that there is some initial assessment to see whether it is required to be filled as the same sort of position or not. It is not unlikely that a position is actually rediverted into another high-priority area. What that can mean is that a vacancy sits on the books when, in reality, a person has been employed in another location.

What happens is that there is significant work force planning in the department going on to make sure that vacancies are applied to the next highest priority. I think that we have all seen significant shifts in the work force from valuing and titling over the past 10 years, with no decrease in service because of automation and computerisation. Those people have actually been employed in other parts of the department. There is also a shift in the work force from Brisbane to the regions. That occurs through that work force planning. So when a Brisbane position comes up, the highest requirement is assessed. At any one time there are significant numbers of positions vacant. On your question on notice last year in September, we identified 45 positions that were going through the stages of being filled. Currently, there are 100 positions being filled. That is normally taking some time because of the difficulties with emerging skills. States are generally competing for the same sorts of people. Similarly, getting people to move into some of the locations that we are interested in often takes more than one round of advertising, so we are advertising jobs more than once and we have got a significant vacancy rate at any one time.

Actually, a more accurate way of assessing the work force is to look at the number of staff employed, which gives you a more accurate trend as to whether there are true vacancies in the organisation or not. The numbers in the MPS are not misleading but they do need some talking to. The numbers in the MPS are actually for FTEs or full-time equivalents and, therefore, do not reflect bodies where you might have part-timers. The numbers in the MPS also do not reflect casuals, so casuals are on top of that. I did a run and as at 26 June, there are actually 3,500 people employed in the department on either a permanent, casual or part-time basis.

**Mr SEENEY:** What I was more specifically referring to was the water reform area. We established before that that is an area where your department has fallen behind in its budget predictions from last year. Certainly I have some concern that it is going to fall behind again in its budget predictions this year.

In that area of water reform, if you would look at the answer you gave me to question four, we have got five policy officer positions that are vacant. One became vacant on 8 December, three of those positions became vacant on the same day, 9 May, and the fifth one became vacant on 5 June. None of them have been filled yet. Surely there must be an explanation for why you would lose five senior policy officers from an area that is currently in critical need of progressing within your department? Can you explain those vacancies?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I do note that they are all being filled, but I will get Rob Freeman to assist you further.

**Mr FREEMAN:** Yes. Perhaps I will defer to my colleague, Scott Spencer, but the positions are actually filled. We actually have people in those jobs and the positions have been upgraded, so that those people are actually in the work force. What I am saying is you have got to look at work force rather than vacancies. If you had referred to the Water Reform Unit today, you would count bodies in those positions. They are actually in those positions while we go through a filling process, but I will defer to Scott Spencer.

**Mr SPENCER:** Those positions, four of them are actually temporary positions and they are the short-term ones you have noted there. We have actually converted those to permanent positions on the understanding that the feedback we are getting from the national level is that the water reform process is going to continue, so we believe that we need them as permanent positions. As Rob said, most of those are filled.

The one we have had difficulty with is the AO6 senior policy officer. We have actually been through a selection process there and no-one was suitable for the position, so it had to go out again. I think he mentioned that process. We are actually fairly worried about that and we have checked with other departments and it appears that at that level we are having difficulties across government attracting suitable applicants. Perhaps we are aiming too high. All of those positions are either in the process of being filled or have been filled as permanent positions.

**Mr SEENEY:** Has there been a larger than ordinary turnover in staff in the water reform unit? It would seem to be indicated by these figures that you gave us in reply to question on notice number four, and it would certainly seem to be the case based on anecdotal evidence that has

been relayed to me. Are you concerned about what appears to be a larger than normal turnover of staff within the water reform unit?

**Mr SPENCER:** Overall, our numbers do not vary that much. These positions were filled. We have changed the classification from temporary to permanent. I think one of the issues I should point out, of course, is what we have done is spread water reform across the department, across the various parts of the water areas. There are two major areas: water management use and water planning. Previously there was a formal Water Reform Unit which was reporting to a steering committee of directors-general. We have basically not continued that process, so we spread them out across the agency. Those people still left in the general area of water reform tend to deal with things like the legislation and water pricing, whereas our water planning is a separate group under a separate general manager. So generally, no, we are not concerned about that. We will be seeking to use the money that has been provided in this budget to supplement that area as well.

**Mr SEENEY:** In terms of the overall staffing figures in the department—once again referring to question on notice No. 4—from the figures you gave me in answer to that question, in June 1998 the staffing level at the department was 3,420 and the staffing level for the Mines and Energy section, which was separate at that time, was 588. Since then your department has inherited the corporate agency from the DPI, the Mines Department and the Native Title Unit from the Premier's Department. As at 30 June this year, staffing levels for the Department of Natural Resources and Mines had dropped to 3,354. Why has your department seen such a dramatic drop in staff numbers over that period of time, and surely that must be impacting on the department's ability to fulfil the roles?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Simply because, in terms of all the changes that you have referred to, one of the ones that you left out was the transfer of staff over to Forestry, which was around about 400. So there is a plus and a minus in terms of—

**Mr SEENEY:** Four hundred?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Yes.

**Mr SEENEY:** Four hundred went from your department to Forestry?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Yes—EPA.

**Mr SEENEY:** I accept that, but that still does not explain the dramatic drop in staff numbers over a period of time, does it?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Apart from not wanting to run an inflated bureaucracy, because I am sure that would come under some criticism from yourself at the same time. I will ask Rob Freeman to fill you in with the details.

**Mr FREEMAN:** I am not really sure. If you look back over the previous MPSs, there is generally a fairly stable work force, so I am not sure how we are getting these numbers. I suspect the numbers that have been supplied to the question on notice actually refer to casuals and part-timers again. Therefore, you are actually counting potentially part bodies and that is why the MPS has always brought it to full-time equivalents, so that you are actually counting complete jobs. There is a real danger when you count those figures in the question on notice—because it asked about jobs—that you can be counting people who are working one day a fortnight, one day a week, or whatever. That is why the MPS figures, which are showing a more stable arrangement, are actually brought to full-time equivalents rather than jobs. Temporary money is actually pushing more towards casual and part-time employment and, therefore, if we talk about jobs, we end up with these funny arrangements.

The other thing that we are dealing with, as I said previously, is an arrangement where at any stage we have got somewhere between 50 and 100 positions at some stage of being filled. So, depending on whether the question is asked on a Monday or a Friday, you may get a different outcome because jobs are normally gazetted on a Thursday.

**Mr SEENEY:** Okay. We will not get into an argument about how the figures are calculated. The point I am making is that since 1988 the department has been given the responsibility of handling a number of very complex issues, such as vegetation management, water resource planning, et cetera. You know what they are without me listing them. Yet when you look at the long-term trends, at least, the number of people within the department are falling. When you look at the number of vacancies that your department already has, there are a lot of vacancies in those critical areas. Is it not a fact that the department is being underfunded for the task that it is being asked to perform?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** No.

**Mr SEENEY:** You are quite confident that the department has the resources to deliver on the predictions that you made in this budget when it demonstrably, dramatically and totally failed to deliver on the predictions you made for the performance outputs in last year's budget?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Yes.

**Mr SEENEY:** I will look forward to estimates hearings next year.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Always.

**Mr SEENEY:** To determine whether or not your confidence has been misplaced.

**Mr HOBBS:** I wish to make it clear that we are very interested in salinity—very interested—and the more research, the better. We will not, however, be bulldozed by dodgy science—and I cite the example of the St George court case—or using the sensationalisation of the issues. The majority of land-holders have always been aware of salt in their soil, saline bores, et cetera, and what your salinity maps indicate. However, just because a land-holder may be in a coloured section of your map does not mean that they will necessarily have a salinity problem. Are you aware that, where ground-proofing has been done with airborne geophysics in the St George-Dirranbandi area, half of those test bores have recorded no salinity, yet it is right in the middle of where your map says it is all red?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I did not see you pop out to that press conference at 11 o'clock.

**Mr HOBBS:** I was here with you, Minister. I wanted to ask you that question.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That does not surprise me whatsoever. One thing that both the Premier and I have made certain of when we released the salinity hazard map was that those maps cannot and should not be used to identify individual properties. So it does not surprise me that results from those bores in the lower Balonne would show that there is no current salinity.

**Mr HOBBS:** No problem.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** No current salinity.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is right.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** But, as we know, salt can move and the various layers that go into that salinity hazard map are about identifying the hazard over time.

**Mr HOBBS:** But they are still hypothetical, are they not? It is a hypothetical assumption.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Predicting that in 30 or 50 years, with various changes, you may in fact end up with some problem?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The problem about people being in denial about this map really does concern me.

**Mr HOBBS:** I am not in denial.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It really does concern me. They do not want to actually acknowledge that some hard decisions need to be made—

**Mr HOBBS:** That is untrue.

**Mr ROBERTSON:**—to maintain the sustainability of this landscape out there.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is untrue.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Perhaps it might be of some assistance to you if I bring up Chris Robson. Chris, you might want to provide some information to Mr Hobbs on why those bores may not currently show that salinity exists.

**Mr ROBSON:** I was only yesterday speaking to the staff at our natural resource sciences centre at Indooroopilly about this particular project, in terms of its progress. It is a partnership with the Commonwealth Bureau of Resource Sciences. To that extent, we have not at this point in time received from them the calibrated data. We are in the process of doing that. So the comments that you may have received from land-holders in that area may be, I guess, unsubstantiated to us at this point in time. It is possible. No-one is saying it is not possible, but at this point in time it is inappropriate for me to be able to respond, in a sense, to say whether it is true or false, except to say the work is under way with the Commonwealth. We are working to calibrate and finalise that work by the end of this calendar year, at which time those results will be made available. There is a working group which a number of the local people are participating in, in terms of understanding the process. It is a fact that the salinity hazard map, as the minister has

said, is indicating potential. The actuality of it will occur over time and it is possible that some areas where through the airborne geophysics work will show there is not salinity is simply a matter of detail.

**Mr HOBBS:** Why is it that detailed studies, EISs, environmental studies and everything else have to be done before any significant resource such as water is involved? Why is it that under your government you are prepared to use Queensland taxpayers' money to resume Cubbie to fill Bob Carr's lake by building a mini Suez Canal and using inter-river transfers with no significant studies?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The problem about the premise to your question is that what you are relying on is a leaked draft—and a very immature draft, at that—of a proposal that is under active consideration by the federal government. Now, one of the challenges for us, in terms of returning water to the environment, is how you do it. That takes on board not just the ecological health of the river system but also the economic health of the communities that are having to bear the brunt of that. A proposal has been put, at the invitation of the Prime Minister, to resume Cubbie Station and retire its water back to—

**Mr HOBBS:** New South Wales.

**Mr ROBERTSON:**—the river system. Look, to start doing some sort of states rights argument—

**Mr HOBBS:** It will not go into—

**The CHAIR:** Order! The member for Warrego will allow the minister to answer the question, please.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** To start doing some sort of states rights border issue is, frankly, an absolute nonsense.

**Mr HOBBS:** It is not.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The border between Queensland and New South Wales is something that man constructed and is something that the landscape does not recognise. The fact that we are trying to return water to the system which happens to flow into New South Wales does not help Bob Carr; what it does is it helps Australia; it helps our environment. It returns water to wetlands and national parks that are currently starved of water. The fact that they are in New South Wales is irrelevant. If it was being returned to the systems for New South Wales irrigators to take up, there might be some validity to the member's question. But it is returning to our environment as Australians—not as Queenslanders or as New South Welshmen. We have a wetland there called Narran Lakes that on historical average used to receive a flooding event once every two years. It is now lucky to receive a flood once every 10 years as a result of extractions out of our river systems. Why is that important? It just happens to be a significant migratory bird breeding habitat. Some 60 species of birds rely on flooding events in that lakes area.

**Mr HOBBS:** It's a river.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It is a terminal lake, for goodness sake. Sixty bird species rely on flooding events there to breed. About half a dozen of these birds are currently on the endangered list. Some of these are migratory birds that come from Asia and places beyond. Surely anyone with any commonsense would understand the importance of providing water to such sensitive areas. That is what we are currently looking at. There is no definite and final plan. The proposal that has been put to the federal government is about seeking in-principle support. How we return the water from Cubbie to the system would require—and it is contained in the final document—further joint studies by the federal government and the state government to maximise the outcome for environmental purposes.

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** I note on page three that the department will spend a further \$6.4 million over four years to improve the State Landcover and Tree Study satellite monitoring program. How does SLATS work, and what studies will be undertaken in 2002-03 using the program?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** SLATS is our eye in the sky that maps the level of tree clearing which occurs in Queensland on a biannual and sometimes annual basis. Every two years we take photographs from the satellite of the state of Queensland and interpret changes apparent from that data to assess the number of hectares being cleared in various parts of Queensland. It is obviously essential that that work continue. In concert with the release of the salinity hazard maps

we also for the first time released data for the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin in terms of the amount of vegetation being cleared.

As the member would be aware, in 2000 we introduced our new Vegetation Management Act. People like Mr Hobbs and others lambasted the Premier in the lead-up to the passing of that legislation when the Premier said that the bush was burning. The data that we released last week demonstrated that the Premier was absolutely right. In the lead-up to the passing of the Vegetation Management Act we saw a significant increase in tree clearing in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin. In the two-year period 1999-2001, the annual clearing rate in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin was 254,000 hectares per year. In 1999-2000, in the lead-up to the passing of the act, that had increased to 357,000 hectares, an increase of 100,000 hectares. Members of parliament who lambasted the Premier for his comments should hang their heads in shame, because the Premier was absolutely right. There was a 30 per cent increase in these terms in one year in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin.

Thankfully, as a result of the passing of that Vegetation Management Act—and I do not want to take this too far because it is only one year's figures and a more responsible view would be to look at it over a number of years—there has been a significant reduction in tree clearing in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin back to 153,000 hectares. That is still more, though, than the annual figure for 1995-1997. Whilst the reduction is welcome, nevertheless it is still too high. That salinity hazard map tells us that all stakeholders need to take those figures on board.

**Mr POOLE:** Will the minister outline progress on the development of regional vegetation management plans mentioned on page nine of the MPS?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** One of the things that we are committed to in, I guess, protecting our landscape from further degradation is engaging the community in terms of making the decisions that will be necessary to ensure that our landscape is sustainable. Under the new Vegetation Management Act 2000 we established not just a ministerial advisory committee on vegetation management, which is an expert committee, but also regional vegetation committees throughout the state. I think that data was provided to Mr Seeney in a question on notice, but the planning done by those regional vegetation management committees indicates that later this year we will start seeing the completion of that vegetation management planning process. That will be a matter of significant interest to us because land-holders, having been provided with full scientific information, will make recommendations to government about how their particular landscape should look in the future.

The other reason that we have resourced these regional vegetation management committees is the acknowledgment that across the landscape one size does not fit all. Despite the fact, for example in the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin in the past year, that 350,000 hectares of land were cleared in one year, there are still parts of the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin that retained over 95 per cent original vegetation coverage. In other parts, however, remnant vegetation cover is down to 25 per cent. The regional vegetation committees, armed with that kind of data, can come up with the recommendations that perhaps look at the revegetation of significantly denuded landscapes whilst at the same time recognising that remnant vegetation levels in other parts of their particular area, in this case the Queensland Murray-Darling Basin, remain significant. Those kinds of local-based recommendations are what we need to advance the vegetation management process further. We do not want to take a top-down approach. We think that local solutions are the best way to go in the long-term. That is what these regional vegetation management committees are all about. In answer to Mr Seeney, over the next 12 months we will see a roll-out of regional vegetation plans from over 20 regional vegetation management committees throughout the state.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Community groups such as Landcare say that they are struggling financially because of the long delay by the Commonwealth in funding stage 2 of the Natural Heritage Trust. Has the state government provided transitional funding to ensure the survival of these groups?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** We have—essentially because negotiations between the Commonwealth and the states have been so protracted in terms of the finalisation of institutional arrangements for Natural Heritage Trust 2. In May, other state natural resource ministers and I gave the Commonwealth a very strong message that prevarication and cost shifting that the Commonwealth was engaged in under NHT2 was unacceptable, that unless bilateral agreements were signed Landcare coordinators right throughout the state would be defunded and that we would lose—and the community more importantly—significant knowledge and resources in terms of advancing Landcare, Bushcare or whatever other type projects. We took action to try to provide

bridging assistance for Landcare groups throughout the state. Some \$364,000 was found within my department to be provided directly to Landcare groups to assist them to maintain their coordinators on board. I have been out to the Lockyer, up to the Sunshine Coast hinterland and last week up at Cambooya near Toowoomba providing that financial assistance, which has been very welcome. It has been welcomed by Landcare groups, because they have significant concerns that the funding may run out just because the Commonwealth and the states cannot reach final agreement on the institutional arrangements for NHT2.

I am concerned about the direction in which NHT2 is going, and we all should be concerned about clearly what is a case of significant cost shifting by the federal government. It is clear that it is struggling in terms of its budget to fund all sorts of interesting adventures that it has undertaken over the last 12 months. Unfortunately, it is Australia's environment which will pay for it. Unless the Commonwealth can come to the negotiating table with the state, recognising the significant in-kind input that we put into programs such as NHT, NAP and others, we will probably be looking at a significant reduction in funding, by a factor of almost 50 per cent, from what we received last year. We could well see a decrease in NHT funding for Queensland from \$20 million to \$10 million. That will have a significant impact on rural and regional Queensland, where most of this work goes on, because Landcare groups in particular will not be able to continue to afford to employ their coordinators to bring together communities for local projects.

**Ms MOLLOY:** A major component of the department's many services includes land registry services mentioned on page 15. Will the minister outline whether there are any opportunities to export Queensland's expertise in land titling and registration to other countries such as China?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** There are. My department's activities advance the government's objectives for expanding export markets and raising the profile of trade and international business as drivers of wealth and job creation to build our regions and to promote Queensland as the Smart State. For Queensland businesses to prosper in today's global market, they must be able to compete, adapt and innovate. Through the Department of State Development in particular, the government provides comprehensive export assistance to help link businesses to international markets. Currently, China is a potential market for land registration and associated cadastral surveying and information systems. The scale of this market is extremely large in our terms. At some 9.3 million square kilometres, China's land area is over 20 per cent larger than Australia's. Its population of 1.3 billion people is governed through 23 provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities and the Hong Kong and Macau special administrative regions. Although China is known as the ancient kingdom, its current land registration system has a relatively short history, the People's Republic having been formed in 1949. Reforms to the current system are being driven by a number of factors, including China's transition towards a more market economy, economic reforms associated with membership of the WTO, resolving land use and land ownership conflicts, and protecting related revenue streams. These revenue streams are significant; for example, during the calendar year 2000 China collected equivalent to \$A4.3 billion in taxes based on land registration information. However, the checking in 1999 and 2000 of just 8 million of the billions of registration certificates identified 510,000 land parcels that were illegally occupied, used, transferred or mortgaged. China recognises the need for various land registration reforms. Priority reforms, including streamlining and enforcing the legal framework that underpins land registration, advancing the automation of land registration and supporting cadastral survey information systems will provide more open access to this information.

In November 2001 my department hosted the inaugural World Land Registration Conference attended by over 65 delegates from authorities for 38 jurisdictions and 30 countries, including a delegate from the PRC. That provided us with the ability to showcase the technology that underpins our land registration system. As a result of that showcase, we are in a position to, I believe, leverage off that and potentially provide that technology and system to China in the future. That is an emerging area for us, one that we do not go into lightly and one that we will be going into with our eyes very wide open. China can challenge all of us in terms of how we engage with it in a business sense. But we have the technology that may be of interest to it and that is a matter we are pursuing.

**Mr POOLE:** As state rural leasehold land covers approximately 65 per cent of Queensland, can the minister outline progress on the development of the Rural Leasehold Strategy mentioned on page 15?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You are correct; state rural leasehold land covers approximately 65 per cent of Queensland. There are nearly 1,500 term leases covering an area of over 86 million hectares and almost 2,900 perpetual leases covering an area of nearly 21 million hectares. Of all

these lease types pastoral holdings are the most dominant in terms of area. Almost half of these leases will be due for renewal within the next 20 years, so I believe it is timely for the government to address a number of serious and emerging issues impacting on this significant public resource in order to ensure that the future management of leasehold land is sustainable economically, environmentally and socially.

The discussion paper released last December was an initial step towards developing a long-term strategy for managing state rural leasehold land. The central theme of the paper was about achievement of sustainable management and use of state rural leasehold land. The period for public comment was three months, concluding on 2 April this year. The closing date was extended to 19 April at the request of a number of key stakeholders, including Agforce, the Conservation Council and Environment Australia. Public workshops to discuss the issues raised in the discussion paper were held in a number of regional centres throughout the state. These workshops were well attended, particularly by lessees. A total of 83 submissions were also received and a summary of the workshops and submissions has been posted on my department's web site for perusal by all stakeholders.

Various stakeholders taking part in the consultation process have raised a wide range of issues. At this stage, the highest priority issues are related to security of tenure for lessees, protection of and access to indigenous cultural heritage on leasehold land, protection of environmentally significant flora and fauna, land degradation and developing a performance based approach to land use and management.

A number of policy tools suggested in the discussion paper were extensively discussed, with the most significant being the use of property management planning, the development of a code of practice for grazing, the possible use of ILUAs to negotiate access and use arrangements between native title holders and lessees, and the use of tenure instruments to achieve greater security for lessees and the use of incentives to encourage better land management practice. The next phase of the consultation process will occur with the release of a draft strategy paper for comment later in the year. This paper will contain an analysis of the issues identified during the initial consultation process as well as possible solutions.

Members should be assured that the government is committed to achieving sustainable management of the state's natural resources and recognises that this is best done in partnership with a profitable rural farming sector. It is also committed to increasing certainty of stakeholders in the state's rural leasehold land, including lessees, indigenous and conservation interests.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** There are a number of references on page 28 to the performance of the Land Court. Will you please comment on the Land Court's performance in terms of case load and number of matters resolved or determined, including the role of alternative dispute resolution in the process?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The court disposed of 900 matters during 2001-02, falling short of the targeted 1,300. This result can be attributed in part to a lower than anticipated number of valuation appeals being lodged. The Land Court calculates its likely valuation appeal case load at 10 per cent of valuation objections lodged with the department. In 2001-02 actual valuation appeals lodged with the court fell to seven per cent of the objections lodged. In light of this performance, the court's target for 2002-03 is set at 1,050. However, the reduction in the number of new matters being lodged with the court in 2001-02 allowed it to reduce its case load to 450 as at 30 June 2002. The corresponding figures for the two preceding financial years were 502 and 951 respectively.

The case load result of 450 exceeds the target case load of 600 and is the lowest case load since 1997-98. For 2002-03 the court's case load target is set at 260, which if achieved would be an historical low. A good start on this performance target is anticipated early in 2002-03, with determinations in some 150 matters in test cases already heard in a number of local government areas. The court's success in hearing and determining matters and reducing its case load is largely attributable to a number of initiatives, most of which had their origins in the 1996-97 review of the court's operations and procedures.

Firstly, the review led to the development of the Land Court Act 2000 and Land Court Rules 2000, which provide the legislative framework for a modern and efficient court. This legislation commenced from 1 July 2000. Secondly, the court has developed alternative dispute resolution procedures as a strategy to assist in resolving matters and reducing hearing time.

Under alternative dispute resolution processes, appellants under the Valuation of Land Act are offered the opportunity to participate in a preliminary conference with representatives from my

department. These conferences are presided over by the judicial registrar on a member of the court. They are conducted in an informal manner where parties are encouraged to identify and discuss the issues and attempt to negotiate a settlement prior to going to a hearing. Mediation is also available to parties on matters such as claims for compensation in terms of the Acquisition of Land Act and appeals under the Water Resources Act and Water Act 2000.

During 2001-02, 511 matters were dealt with by alternative dispute resolution processes, resulting in 414, or approximately 81 per cent, of cases being resolved. It should be noted that some matters are withdrawn by appellants prior to hearing for a number of reasons, including reconsideration by appellants, reconsideration by the respondent or through negotiation between the parties without the intervention of the court. However, attainment of the target measure is due in large part to the use of alternative dispute resolution processes.

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

**Mr SEENEY:** Minister, you spoke earlier in answer to a government question about the regional vegetation plans. In the output statement for Integrated Natural Resource Planning on page 11, I note that none of the promised six regional vegetation plans was completed in the past year, although eight are to be completed this month. Can you tell us the reason for the delay? Why was the department not able to meet its objectives in terms of finalising the regional vegetation plans?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** My view would be that it was not a lack of resources provided to the regional vegetation management committees but rather the demand by participants on these committees for more extensive information to be provided by the department. We have talked a lot about science today. The one thing that I was pleasantly surprised about when I took over this portfolio was how much land-holders have a thirst for knowledge in terms of making the decisions they need to make about future sustainability of, for example, their own land-holdings. Meeting those demands obviously challenges the department in terms of getting the information land-holders or, in this case, participants in regional vegetation management committees, actually require.

Once having received that information, assessing the data provided to them often requires the regional vegetation management committees themselves to extend their own time lines just to get their heads around what it is they have to consider. I do not see any problem with those extended time lines, because it indicates to me, through my experience not just with my own ministerial advisory committee on vegetation management but also through discussion with members of regional vegetation management committees, that it is largely a reflection of the size of the job that is before them and their own need for additional time to complete their planning process.

**Mr SEENEY:** In question on notice No. 2 I asked you about legal action in which your department was involved. My interest was in legal action in relation to vegetation management offences. We spoke earlier about the fact that the department's scientific position had been successfully challenged in terms of the water reform process. How many of those cases in which your department was involved in legal action related to vegetation management offences and how many of those cases has the department won and lost? Perhaps it is too much to ask you today, but how much has NR&M spent on that legal action? I am more interested in how many cases the department has won and lost.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Given the detail that you are legitimately seeking, we will take that on notice and provide you with that data.

**Mr SEENEY:** I thank you for that. I had expected to receive that data when I asked the original question on notice. But I thank you for the assurance that you will now provide it and I am only too happy to put that on notice.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am here to help.

**Mr SEENEY:** The Integrated Natural Resource Management and Use output statement on page 16 states that 90 per cent of vegetation management applications are processed within customer service demands. That would seem to be in contradiction to the anecdotal evidence that I receive at times from disgruntled land-holders. Can you tell the committee exactly what are the standards that apply to vegetation management applications—the standards to which you believe 90 per cent of the applications conform? Is it possible for those standards to vary between regional offices?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Anecdotally, the evidence that I have received suggests that those output statements are in fact correct. The resources provided in this year's budget to continue the enhanced services put into place over the last three years demonstrate the government's ongoing commitment to sustainable vegetation management. My department is now assessing approximately 500 applications for clearing each year. Of these, just over half the permits are for freehold with the remainder on leasehold. These permits covered approximately 400,000 hectares of remnant vegetation between 1 June 2001 to 7 June 2002. Just over 30 per cent of the area of applications is on leasehold land, with the remainder over freehold. A further 130,000 hectares of regrowth clearing has also been approved over leasehold land.

Staff have undertaken competency based training to undertake these assessments against strict criteria and within statutory time frames set down in the legislation. Assessments involve field inspections and discussions with applicants. The advice that my department gives me is that the outcomes contained in the budget papers are correct. Obviously, in some cases the issues being dealt with by vegetation management officers are complex ones, but I am not aware that there is any other data floating about that suggests that the figures contained in the budget statements are not correct.

**Mr SEENEY:** In your reply to another question on notice, question No. 1, you waxed lyrical about community engagement being part and parcel of the way your government does business. When do you intend to engage the community of Dirranbandi in your proposal to decommission Cubbie Station?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Very shortly. A lot of nonsense has been spoken by certain people around the place that we have ignored the landowners, in this case Cubbie Station. It is absolute nonsense to suggest that we would do that. Let me just take you through the process involved.

**Mr SEENEY:** It is not just the landowners involved; it is the whole community of Dirranbandi.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This is important. God forbid you should ever actually be in my position; you might have to do the same thing. In terms of engaging the Commonwealth, you should probably take on board the processes that we need to go through. We were asked to put this proposal by the Prime Minister to federal cabinet.

**Mr SEENEY:** So it was the Prime Minister's idea? Are you suggesting that it was the Prime Minister's idea?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The proposal that has been drafted seeks in principle support from the federal government.

**Mr SEENEY:** Blame somebody else.

**Mr HOBBS:** It came from you guys. You know that.

**Mr SEENEY:** Blame the Prime Minister.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not blaming the federal government in any way whatsoever.

**Mr SEENEY:** You are blaming the Prime Minister. That is a new one.

**The CHAIR:** Order! You will allow the minister to answer the question.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** At the invitation of the Prime Minister, a proposal has been drafted that seeks in-principle support from the federal government to progress the issue. The proposal that has gone to it is an extensive document that brings together a range of work that has already been done in terms of actions that may need to be taken to protect the ecological health of the river system.

Contained in that proposal is also a preliminary analysis of the socioeconomic impacts on the Dirranbandi and St George communities of the decommissioning of Cubbie. Contained in that proposal is also the acknowledgment that should in-principle support be gained from the federal government the next stage would be engagement with the local community, among other work. Once you get in-principle support, you can then move forward. Unless you actually have a proposal in place, you cannot engage a community. Do you expect us to go out there and say, 'Gee, Mr Grabbe, we're thinking of resuming your property. What do you reckon about that?' I know what his answer is going to be. He is going to say, 'No, we disagree with that.' Okay. What do you do with the proposal then? You can then continue on with it knowing that John Grabbe and others will oppose it. We know that of course they are going to oppose it. There is no secret in that. That was always understood. I did not think for one moment that the owners of Cubbie Station would roll over and say, 'Absolutely.'

I reiterate that contained in the proposal is an acknowledgment that if in-principle support is gained from the federal government the next step in the process along with a range of other studies on socioeconomic and ecological impacts is engagement with the local community. The fact that people are running around with a draft leaked document does not change the responsible agenda that needs to be followed by both the state and Commonwealth governments in relation to progressing this proposal. That is the procedure that you would have followed—

**Mr SEENEY:** No.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is the procedure that cannot be—

**Mr SEENEY:** No, it is no good going out and negotiating after you have made the decision.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allocated for the consideration of estimates for the Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines has expired. Thank you, Minister.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Mr Chairman, can I just read into the transcript a minor correction before you close. In relation to a question from Ms Molloy about water trading, I indicated that a pilot scheme would occur on the Weir River in the Border Rivers catchment. That is not correct. We are piloting a metering trial in that catchment. Trial trading is occurring in Mareeba/Dimbulah, which I mentioned, and the Nogoia/Mackenzie and Lower Mary River. I just needed to make that correction for the record.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister, and thank you to the advisers for your attendance. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the *Hansard* Internet quick access web site within two hours from now. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Environment and will begin at 10 minutes to 12.

Sitting suspended from 11.47 a.m. to 11.58 a.m.

**ENVIRONMENT****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. D. M. Wells, Minister for Environment  
Dr J. Cole, Executive Director, Sustainable Industries Division  
Ms O. Crimp, Executive Director, Planning Division  
Mr A. Feely, Executive Director, Parks Division  
Mr J. Gilmour, Executive Director, Corporate Affairs Division  
Mr N. O'Sullivan, A/Director, Financial Services Unit  
Mr J. Purtill, Director-General  
Mr W. Williamson, Executive Director, Environmental Operations Division

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**The CHAIR:** I declare the hearing open. On behalf of the committee, I welcome the minister, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. My name is Chris Cummins. I am the member for Kawana and chair of Estimates Committee E. My fellow committee members are Howard Hobbs, the member for Warrego; Cate Molloy, the member for Noosa; Robert Poole, the member for Gaven; Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone; and Jeff Seeney, the member for Callide. I welcome Vince Lester, the member for Keppel, who, although not a member of Estimates Committee E, has the committee's leave to ask questions of the minister.

The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Environment. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents. The sessional orders require that at least half of the time for questions at today's hearing is to be allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns at asking questions in blocks lasting approximately 20 minutes.

In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, the committee has resolved that video coverage is allowed only during the opening statements. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript. Please also ensure that all mobile phones and pagers are switched off while in this chamber so as not to disrupt our proceedings. In the event that some of those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that in accordance with standing order 195 the public may be admitted to or excluded from these hearings at the pleasure of our committee.

The time allocated for the portfolio is four hours with a one-hour break between 12.50 p.m. and 1.50 p.m. I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr WELLS:** If I may make a brief introductory statement, Mr Chairman.

**The CHAIR:** If you do, we ask that you limit it to five minutes please.

**Mr WELLS:** Thank you. Valuing the environment is one of the Queensland government's top priorities, and this year's budget builds on the gains made in the previous year. As well as ensuring a clean environment and protecting our natural and cultural heritage, the government is also committed to sustainable use of our natural capital. Sustainable use must be promoted as a cost-effective way to ensure that environmental management and conservation contribute strongly to the economic, social and environmental processes that shape this state. In Queensland we currently employ 552 permanent rangers to look after our national parks and forests, marine parks and wildlife. Entry to our national parks remains free. Funding for the

Environmental Protection Agency this year totals \$334 million. This total comprises an operating budget of \$312 million and a capital budget of \$22 million.

The development of region specific coastal plans in conjunction with the state coastal plan will be the priority focus for coastal management resources, with the aim of safeguarding this valuable resource for future generations of Queenslanders. The health of our magnificent Queensland coast and the health of our waterways is a priority for this government. In south-east Queensland our coastal regions and waterways, including Moreton Bay, represent unique ecosystems that support populations of dugong, turtle and migratory birds. We have a responsibility to protect these species and ensure the health of our bay and waterways.

The government is working with local councils to ensure the health of our waterways. More work, however, needs to be done. Isolated occurrences of lyngbya have occurred in Moreton Bay and are the subject of a major research and mitigation effort. Water quality monitoring of marine and estuarine waters occurs on a targeted basis throughout Queensland. In south-east Queensland, for example, over 200 monitoring sites are maintained in a major estuarine and marine ecosystem health monitoring program. Reports were received in May about the presence of a potentially toxic algae, pfiesteria, in the Brisbane and Bremer rivers. In response to those reports, my department quickly responded and conducted a widespread sampling program to determine the extent of the presence of pfiesteria in south-east Queensland waterways. The good news, which is supplementary to a question asked by the honourable member for Keppel in the House, is that the three locations mentioned in the early reports have all tested negative to the presence of pfiesteria.

Valuing the environment remains one of the government's key priorities, and the Environmental Protection Agency will ensure that our national parks remain accessible for all Queenslanders and are well managed, that our coastal regions remain pristine and that our bays and waterways remain a haven for a range of ecosystems. In the area of protecting our natural and cultural heritage, the government has committed \$10 million to continue enhanced park maintenance initiatives, including employing 140 additional rangers. I am pleased to report that 80 rangers were appointed during 2001-02. The balance of 60 will be appointed during 2002-03. The capital works program on parks and forests will be funded by an allocation of \$10.5 million for works on visitor facilities, walking tracks, fire trails, fencing, internal roads and other improvements. We will provide a further 100 traineeships under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative, giving young unemployed people a chance to learn valuable skills by working on national parks.

This government has taken a lead role in finding sustainable fuel solutions for Queensland and to kick-start an ethanol market. In December 2001 this government, on the initiative of the Minister for Public Works, committed to becoming the first institutional buyer of ethanol blended fuel from E10 fuel outlets. Over 80 EPA cars are now operating on E10. My own car has been operating on E10 for just over 12 months. In June this year the government co-hosted and sponsored the first Pacific ethanol conference held here in Brisbane. We have promoted the Solar Cooler Schools Program throughout Queensland. Six Queensland schools have already benefited, with another 11 scheduled over the next year.

The Environmental Protection Agency takes its commitment to recycling and waste seriously. Today I am pleased to release a report that clearly shows that Queenslanders are recycling more waste than ever before. This information has been collated to help local government and community organisations to better plan their recycling systems, to increase collection efficiencies and reduce costs. One of the results of this survey is that Queenslanders are now recycling about 43 kilograms each per year—almost double the amount recorded in 1997. I hope to provide the committee with more details of that report, which I table, during today's hearing

**The CHAIR:** I ask that the committee approve the tabling of the document that the minister has offered to table. We are in agreement. The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Keppel.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 9, which refers to management techniques of feral animals. What is the estimated number of dingoes in Queensland, or what was the number at the time of your last research study? What funding is allocated to dingo eradication on crown land in the forthcoming financial year?

**Mr WELLS:** Much of that question would be better asked of the Minister for Natural Resources. The Environment Department is not responsible for dingoes, except those dingoes which are in national parks. In respect of particular national parks, we can give you an estimate of how many dingoes there are in those national parks. The latest figure that I received with respect

to Fraser Island for dingo numbers was 160. With respect to dingoes in other national parks, I would have to give you those figures one by one. If you were interested in nominating particular national parks, it would be appropriate for you to do so.

With regard to the amount of money that is likely to be expended on feral animal control generally, \$1.3 million is going to be expended between 2002 and 2003 on feral animal control. We are going to be focusing our efforts in respect of wild dogs, and wild dogs include those that have recently been released into national parks. I know that in respect of your area you are particularly interested in the Berserker ranges wilderness area. Recently, the issue there has not been dingoes but it has been wild pigs. We put onto the job a pig trapper who has so far netted dozens and dozens of pigs.

The only problem with feral animal control, as you know, is that unless you get something like 95 per cent of the ferals you do not eliminate them from a particular site—whether you are talking about wild dogs or wild dingoes. The best way to do that, however, if you are going to make a serious attempt to do it is to apply the good neighbour policy.

My department increasingly attempts to work very closely with neighbours to national parks with a view to ensuring that there is, if possible, a clean sweep of the ferals in a particular place. There is absolutely no point in us in a national park wiping out all of the ferals in that area if next door the neighbour is not doing the same thing at the same time; because these animals, for some reason, do not acknowledge the boundaries that we draw. Likewise, if a neighbour is doing it then it is necessary for us to do it at the same time as them. So it is a matter of coordination with the community, and we are doing our very best to enhance those programs and to keep the numbers of ferals down.

**Mr LESTER:** Minister, you talk about being a good neighbour, or neighbours being good to you, but to be quite honest we do have problems in that area as far as the department is concerned. I refer to Wilsons Pawpaws, a very up-market organisation that grows pawpaws and other fruits. It seems to have had awful trouble with feral animals—pigs, et cetera—getting into that particular property. With all the goodwill in the world we do not appear to have got a long way towards overcoming that problem, at least not from the representations I get and I think the member for Rockhampton gets from these very distraught people. I refer to question on notice No. 9 in which you indicate management techniques of feral animals. Is it permissible for individuals or local councils to hunt dingoes on crown land?

**Mr WELLS:** Can I respond to both of the things that the honourable member raised? With respect to the particular farm that he mentioned, this is one that has been drawn to my attention repeatedly both by the honourable member for Keppel and the honourable member for Rockhampton. In the most recent correspondence the adjoining small crop producer, Mr Wilson, has acknowledged that the program has removed most of the feral pigs of concern, including animals taken on his property. A number of consultations and discussions have taken place with that particular farmer at the honourable member's behest and at the behest of the honourable member for Rockhampton. As he knows, it is an extremely intractable problem. We are talking about a farm which has a high hill going up to the protected area. The appropriate place for the fence that would be needed to keep the feral pigs out would actually be more likely to be on the farmer's land than on the state owned land. That makes the problem particularly intractable. But the point I come back to is that he has acknowledged in recent correspondence that we are doing our best to work with him in respect of the elimination of the pigs that are annoying his property.

A significant proportion of that \$1.3 million that I mentioned a little while ago, which is the amount of money that is being spent on the elimination of feral animals and weeds, is going into exactly the kind of problems that the honourable member is concerned about. I think that the honourable member can acknowledge that we are dealing with an intractable problem here, and we are doing our best to work with it. May I say to the committee that I appreciate the honourable member's advice and guidance from time to time as to how we should best target that effort.

**Mr LESTER:** Do you have a specific allocation of money for dingo eradication? You have mentioned feral animals, pigs, et cetera. I am just wondering if there is a specific amount for dingoes.

**Mr WELLS:** No, there is not a specific amount for dingoes, because what we do is deal with ferals in accordance with whatever the occasion requires. We have to prioritise according to the exigencies of the moment. Dingoes have a particular status with respect to national parks. Dingoes are a declared pest everywhere in Queensland except in national parks, where they are a protected species by virtue of the fact that they are part of the heritage habitat that a national

park represents. So eradication programs with respect to dingoes are conducted outside national parks. Consequently, those are not within my portfolio. So those particular questions would have to be asked of the Minister for Natural Resources.

**Mr LESTER:** Does your department have consultation in this area with the department? I mean, we have a chap up there, too, who has goats, and they are forever being harassed, mainly by dingoes.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, we have consultation with the Department of State Development. But if the dingoes are coming from national parks then it is our responsibility and we take our own measures, including—how can I put this—the protection of the boundaries of the national parks from dingoes that would escape from those national parks. But I just have to repeat that if you are looking for a fund that says eradication of dingoes in a particular area, that is the responsibility of DNR.

There is a statewide EPA-DNR partnership in respect of this issue. We do liaise with the department, but the dingo and wild dog management plan was actually announced by Minister Robertson at a community cabinet meeting some months ago. It would really be best if the member asked questions relating to dingoes, other than dingoes in national parks, of Minister Robertson.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 9 and your good neighbour policy. In light of a recent case in Townsville, with the massive increase in dingo numbers, terrifying attacks on a young girl—I understand she was only two years old—and what I am led to believe is substantial inaction by Queensland Parks and Wildlife and Minister Reynolds, which energised the local community into action, do you agree that Queensland Parks and Wildlife should have taken greater action to reduce numbers? What is being done at present to bring these numbers under control along the Queensland coast? Numbers are expanding and people are being attacked. We do not want another death, but it is possible.

**Mr WELLS:** All efforts that can be made to avoid injury of a serious or even not serious kind from dingoes are being made. With respect to the Townsville example, my department offered support to patrol the adjoining Townsville town common and Cape Pallarenda conservation parks at the same time. A joint patrol of Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service staff and council health officers was undertaken on Thursday, 4 July 2002 and on 5 July 2002 for the suburb of Pallarenda and adjoining protected areas. As soon as I became aware that it had happened I asked my department to take immediate action. That immediate action was taken.

We cannot respond to an incident until the incident occurs, and until we have evidence that there is a likelihood of an incident we cannot respond proactively. I can assure the member that we are responding proactively. I can give him some examples from Fraser Island of how we have proactively taken measures to do all that we possibly can to reduce the dingo threat on the island. A risk assessment was put in place. As a result of that risk assessment we went ahead and produced a dingo management strategy. That strategy is now implemented or in the process of being implemented. There was a substantial increase in the fines. We have implemented a policy of zero tolerance. We have issued 150 infringement notices. We have put on an additional 15 camp ground rangers. In addition, we have put on four dingo management rangers. We have increased the number of warning signs. We have put out brochures. We have put in place a process of hazing of the dingoes using ratshot and slingshot. We have destroyed problem dingoes.

There is a standing operational procedure in my department that applies to Fraser Island, Townsville and everywhere else any dingo is seen to be a problem dingo that it will be destroyed. A problem dingo is one that shows signs of habituation. I can assure the honourable member that the proactive action of destroying any dingo that shows any signs of habituation is one we will pursue relentlessly.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 9 and your feral animal management techniques. Given that we have already had one death in Queensland at the jaws of a dingo, do you consider risk to human life to be a key performance indicator?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. As a matter of fact, when we were drawing up the parks master plan, which is the plan which governs the manner in which services are delivered throughout our national parks system, I asked the department to put in an additional chapter, and that was risk. The whole idea of that is to ensure that the capital works program articulates with the level of risk identified in a particular park and that all actions of my department articulate with the level of risk identified in a particular national park.

In respect of a place such as the Townsville common, where there was the event the honourable member referred to, that will now automatically come into play. The allocation of human and capital resources will be triggered to ensure that risk is mitigated. It will be a matter of operational decision making as to whether it should be human or capital resources that are applied to the resolution of the problem in Townsville or anywhere else.

I would like to assure the honourable member that it is institutionally there. It does not require a knee-jerk reaction in any case. What it requires is simply the application of the formula that was established. We have a chapter in the parks master plan. That articulates with the allocation of human and natural resources. As soon as there is an incident indicating any degree of risk, that protocol comes into play. By the end of the session I will table a copy of the parks master plan so that the honourable member can examine it in greater detail.

**Mr LESTER:** You do not believe this is being reactive rather than proactive?

**Mr WELLS:** I think the whole tenor of what I have explained for the last few minutes answers that question.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer again to question on notice No. 9 and your feral animal management techniques. How many reported attacks by dingoes have there been in the past two years and where have they occurred?

**Mr WELLS:** Most of the reports have occurred at Fraser Island. I have already spoken in great detail about the management plan on Fraser Island and what is being done in that respect. In respect of other areas, again I emphasise the fact that dingo incidents, except where they occur in a national park, are not the responsibility of the Environmental Protection Agency. The number of dingo incidents that have been reported outside of Fraser Island in national parks can be counted on your fingers, but there is a significant number on Fraser Island.

The proactive culling of dingoes—that is, those that are habituated to human beings or those that have shown any signs of human aggression—has involved the destruction of 40 dingoes as part of the dingo management plan. We had the cull and then there were others in addition to that. I am sure the honourable member knows about the dingo management plan. I have here a table of where the dingoes were culled on Fraser Island. I am happy to let the honourable member have a copy of that.

**Mr LESTER:** Are you able to give me the exact number of attacks? You have said 'many' and so on.

**Mr WELLS:** We do not have here right now the exact number of dingo attacks. I have here the response. Since 9 May 2001 there have been 11 dingoes culled on Fraser Island. Those were not in response to attacks only; they were in response to habituation. Let me make it very, very clear. A dingo, being a wild animal, will normally steer away from human beings. But on national parks people sometimes feed them. The people who feed the national parks' dingoes are putting human life at risk. They do not realise it, but they are putting human life at risk.

A dingo loses its fear of human beings by a process of being fed by human beings. When that occurs, the dingo becomes habituated. It fearlessly approaches a human being and then when the human being sees it the human being sees what they think looks like a dog—a reasonably good looking dog. What they are really interacting with is a wild animal. As soon as the interaction takes place the wild instincts take over and this can lead to the negative responses. As I said, we have issued 150 infringement notices with a policy of—

**Mr LESTER:** Minister, I asked how many attacks there have been. Will I be able to get that answer, if not now, then a bit later?

**Mr WELLS:** Do you want to know the number of attacks or do you want to know the number of incidents? 'Attacks' means dingoes actually biting people. 'Incidents' involves dingoes attempting to nip people or looking aggressive—

**Mr LESTER:** Perhaps your records would show both.

**Mr WELLS:** You would like both?

**Mr LESTER:** That is the question I asked.

**Mr WELLS:** I am happy to give you a table of that. I am happy now to give you a table of the incidents on Fraser Island. Actual attacks are very, very few in number.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. The minister mentioned he would table a copy of the parks master plan.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** With the agreement of the committee, that document can be tabled. And the minister indicated he will provide a table of the number of attacks and incidents involving dingoes in national parks.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 7 of the MPS reference is made to the appointment of 60 new rangers. Minister, can you report on progress in implementing the government's election commitment to employing 140 new rangers?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. The program to implement that election commitment is going ahead. We have 60 new rangers in place plus another 19 specifically indigenous rangers. I was very pleased that we were able to appoint a number of specifically indigenous rangers. We worked with the Anti-Discrimination Commission in order to ensure that we did not fall foul of the Anti-Discrimination Act, which of course stipulates that you cannot discriminate in the work force on the basis of ethnic origin. However, when I was Attorney-General and we drew up that provision we were very careful to put in a section that said that this did not apply where there was a genuine occupational requirement.

The association of the indigenous people of Australia with the land gives them a special affinity and a special attractiveness as interpreters of the heritage sites of which our national parks are examples. They have a special capacity and, particularly for overseas tourists, they have a special attractiveness as interpreters of those sites and a special affinity as carers of those particular sites. I would like to ask Mr Feely, who is the relevant executive director, if he would speak more about the details of the roll-out of the program.

**Mr FEELY:** The government's commitment to enhanced park maintenance has resulted in a further \$10 million per annum being allowed for the purposes of recruiting these rangers, which resulted in an additional 140 ranger positions being progressively filled over the 2001-02 and the 2002-03 financial years to protect and maintain Queensland's world-class system of parks and forests and reserves. Eighty rangers were appointed during 2001-02. A further 60 permanent ranger positions will be filled during the coming financial year.

As a matter of interest, the public advertisement of 31 ranger positions early November last year resulted in more than 3,800 applications for those positions. That demonstrates the volume of people who want to join the parks service to become part of the enthusiastic team and whose vocation is the conservation and presentation of our natural assets.

Among the 80 that we have recruited to date, there are 19 indigenous rangers, which were advertised for during February 2002. These have been filled throughout the state from Cape York to southern Queensland and to the west, including the Simpson Desert national park.

**Mr POOLE:** Reference is made to a three-year rolling capital works program for national parks on page 7 of the MPS. Can you explain to the committee how this expenditure is prioritised and how this will benefit national park users?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, this is now a computer based program so that the roll out of the capital works program is prioritised according to key criteria. If I could repeat some information that the honourable member for Keppel managed to wring out of me, we have now a parks master plan. The chapter on risk assessment now articulates with this particular program the criteria according to which the capital works are undertaken, including the risk level. That is actually weighted as one of the two most important. The other most important one, to be perfectly frank about it, is public commitment. If the government says that we are going to do something in the park and we have a mandate to do that, then we must do that. Sustainable use is another criterion. I will ask Mr Feely again if he would like to fill us in on some of the details.

**Mr FEELY:** We developed a computer based system to assist and prioritise the expenditure for the capital works program. It has been designed to provide an accountable, transparent and fair allocation of funding to capital works projects. The project bids are received from staff across the state and are assessed according to seven key criteria. These are improved cultural and environmental protection; better presentation to visitors; improved management capacity; enhanced community engagement; a previous public commitment, as a minister noted; the level of risk; and a sustainable use. Some preference is given to proposals that have already attracted external funding—for argument's sake, other grants. There is a team of regional and central office based people who assess all of these projects. It is allocated on the basis of statewide priorities. One hundred per cent of the capital has been allocated for the first financial year of the program,

only 80 per cent for the second and 60 per cent for the third. That is to allow to us deal with emerging priorities over time that may turn up, particularly safety issues.

A discretionary minor capital works allocation has also been provided to each region for projects not funded—again, that turn up as a matter of urgency. An amount of \$0.5 million has been allocated from this program for staff housing. Additional funding will be considered after the staff housing review has been conducted in 2002-03.

The capital works rolling plan delivers a much higher standard of national park and forest management in Queensland. That is driven because it allows us to plan over several years for major projects. In areas such as Cape York where we are very weather dependent, it enables us to build throughout the winter building season without getting annual approvals. Care has been taken to balance the need to attend to infrastructure at the end of its service life with a need to respond to other new community expectations and emerging issues. We have a vast investment in capital works on parks and forests.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Page 2 of the MPS refers to the development of sustainable industries and the support, encouragement and promotion of markets for sustainable goods. Can you explain how this is being implemented with particular reference to ethanol, which you mentioned in your opening remarks, and how this will benefit Queensland?

**Mr WELLS:** The development of an ethanol industry in Queensland is going to be a win-win-win for everybody. Ethanol has this characteristic: if every car that was configured for unleaded petrol in Queensland was to be running on ethanol blend E10, the consequence would be that there would be a dramatic reduction of one million tonnes of greenhouse gases every year from the amount that is now polluting our atmosphere. At the same time, it would stimulate the sugar and other primary industries so that we were reliant on a renewable source of energy. It would also reduce our necessity for imports, which we have to undertake in some years, by providing greater stability. The agricultural producers would be growing their crops for a domestic and stable market rather than being, to the extent that they now are, at the mercy of fluctuating international prices. The sugar industry for the past three years has been at the mercy of low international prices, and ethanol provides a vehicle by which—no pun intended—that reliance can be reduced.

The big breakthrough as far as Queensland is concerned is the willingness of the government to turn its vehicle fleet over to ethanol. I have 84 vehicles in my department, which at the moment I believe have ethanol in them. It depends on how straight they shot the bowser pump, I suppose, but I think that it is in them. It might be a few more than 85 or it might be a few less, but it is around about that figure. That is how many that I have been told about.

The Minister for Public Works took the initiative of indicating that the government vehicle fleet is available. This is going to kick-start an ethanol market in a way that nothing else could. A government, coming behind an innovation like this, is going to be more decisive than any other institutional purchaser. This is being rolled out by John Cole from my sustainable industries division. I would ask him if he would come forward and give us some more detail.

**Dr COLE:** The background that the minister has provided, in fact, has driven growing interest locally in the use of alternative fuels like fire fuels, including ethanol. Driven by these core public policy commitments, the government has established the Queensland ethanol industry.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Can I ask for a two-minute extension?

**The CHAIR:** Agreed to.

**Dr COLE:** The government has established the Queensland ethanol industry interdepartmental committee and it has directed that this group oversee and plan for the increased production and use of ethanol in Queensland. The role of the IDC is to review issues that may impact on the production and use of ethanol in Queensland and ensure that there is a consistent whole-of-government approach to the issue providing industry, farmers, consumers and the general public with a cohesive government view.

The government is actively supporting the trial of ethanol, as the minister has pointed out. Indeed, there are six new locations in the metropolitan area—BP stations dispensing ethanol 10. That is available, obviously, to the public as well as to the government vehicles. We have been advised that most government vehicles in fact are able to use E10.

The development of biofuels such as ethanol in Queensland has the strong support of the EPA. Indeed, the Queensland sustainable energy innovation fund is being used to support the commercialisation of renewable energy and energy-efficient technologies including biofuels. We are doing that because this area has the potential to deliver major environmental improvements

in terms of air quality, integrated waste management and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The increased use of biofuels will also provide opportunities for increased regional development, as the minister has alluded to, and regeneration while offering a commonsense and sustainable alternative to the many risks associated with petroleum fuels. At this very point, there are at least 180 million litres of biofuels being proposed by different proponents in south-east Queensland.

**The CHAIR:** The committee has agreed that the time allocated will now go to the non-government members. I call the member for Keppel.

**Mr LESTER:** We are still talking about risk management. Should we be including education programs to minimise attacks and nips and whatever else we talk about?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. Just as a matter of boring procedure, what line of the budget papers or the MPS are we on?

**Mr LESTER:** On page 13 of the MPS it states that there have been 160,000 camper nights. I want to know what education programs have been given to those people. That is a heck of a lot of people. I need to know what we have been doing about it. Are people educated? You said earlier that some people mistake dingoes for dogs. There must be some problem in the system somewhere.

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. The question is a very appropriate one, I think. We have increased dramatically the education component with respect to Fraser Island. That trend was actually occurring under my predecessor before the fatal attack on Fraser Island. That is part of the implementation of the risk management strategy and the dingo management strategy. It has been dramatically increased. There are signs being put up increasingly.

I was actually on a private visit to Fraser Island with my children and I was driving down to the waterfront and there was your voice saying that we had not done enough firebreaks, particularly on the central coast. So I took care, even though I was on a day off and I was with my children—I was paying for it myself—to look for the firebreaks on Fraser Island on that day and there were lots of firebreaks. We had done a lot of back-burning to make sure that we did not have the disasters that happened—

**Mr LESTER:** Have firebreaks much to do with education?

**Mr WELLS:** I think that people need to be educated about firebreaks just as they need to be educated about dingoes.

**Mr LESTER:** As well.

**Mr WELLS:** You cannot concentrate on just one subject. I just wanted to let you know. I just wanted to give you a little bit of that homely stuff, that I listen to the things that you say very closely, particularly when you say them on the radio when I am trying to have a day off. But we have increased it. If you notice, as I noticed on this particular day when I went over to Fraser Island, the signs that are going up increasingly on the tracks as well as at the camping grounds—

**Mr LESTER:** But, Minister, are they given a brochure or something like that? What are we doing?

**The CHAIR:** Order! The member will allow the minister to answer the question, please.

**Mr WELLS:** The signs are going up. You are not listening to me. The signs are going up on the tracks as well as on the camping grounds. So people are repetitively reminded that they need to be aware. They say 'Be dingo aware', and some dingoes have become threatening. We are increasingly improving the penetration of the pamphlets on the boats on the way over. On visits that I have made to Fraser Island, I have been very careful to notice the extent to which the people taking the boat over advise people of the dangers of dingoes. Pamphlets are being put out and are getting to people in increasingly great numbers. Rangers are going around educating people by telling them on the spot, 'Do not do this.' Recently, I caused my department to advise people that they should not camp outside designated camping areas if they have children under 14 with them. A whole range of steps are being undertaken to educate people about the dangers of dingoes.

**Mr LESTER:** But are people getting the message? Not everybody reads signs. You probably know yourself that they do not all read election signs. I am just simply saying: are you happy that the education program is good enough? If we are still mistaking dingoes for dogs, or dogs for dingoes, or whatever, there is obviously a problem. Can it be improved?

**Mr WELLS:** We always try to do better. I have said to you already about signs, about education programs. We have officers going around looking, and I told you that I monitored it

once myself when I was on a boat on my way over. We have got officers going and monitoring the public education programs to ensure that they are of a high quality; we have signs and pamphlets; we have got repeated warnings; we have rangers going around and telling people. I do not know whether you have seen any publicity about it at all, but the decision was taken a little while ago to advise people that they should not have children outside of designated camping areas. We are doing all that we can. I cannot think of anything that we are not doing that we could do that would improve the education programs. We have even got officers visiting four-wheel drive hire and hostel places in Hervey Bay, Maryborough and Rainbow Beach to check to see that they are telling people the right things. I can assure the honourable member for Keppel that if he comes up with any idea of anything that we could do that we are not yet doing that would be useful, we will take it on board and we will take it on board with alacrity.

**Mr LESTER:** I am always prepared to give information, if I have it, in the people's interest. Have you any idea how many pamphlets have been printed? Are they multilingual? How many signs have been put up? Have we got any information on this at this point?

**Mr WELLS:** We have got special arrangements for overseas people. We have got rangers checking on overseas people, particularly. A lot of this has the personal touch as well and so the rangers are doing that. The pamphlets are available to everybody. The occasions when you have got somebody going to Fraser Island who does not have the language and does not have the capacity to be told of the risks by the tour guides, or whatever, are very, very rare. However, the rangers ensure that the tour guides are all informed and, as I said, these people are monitored. The program of monitoring them will continue.

**Mr LESTER:** Do we have a performance method in place to see how it is working, like we evaluate most things we do?

**Mr WELLS:** I suppose the proof of the pudding is in the eating. We just keep trying to do the right thing. We have spent \$169,000 on this particular public education program.

**Mr LESTER:** In effect, you have spent a dollar per person per camper night, roughly. I refer again to question on notice No. 9 on your feral animal management techniques. What action did your department take on each of these occasions?

**Mr WELLS:** I think it is 50 cents, on that, because I think the number of visitors to Fraser Island is twice that. However, that does not take into account the staff time, which would, of course, much more than double it. We have spent a significant amount of money trying to protect people from that particular danger. I am answering the last comment that you made, I am sorry. I will get to the question that you have just asked.

I would like to make this point: the problem arose on Fraser Island from habituated dingoes. We eliminated the habituated dingoes in the cull. That was why we did the cull. It was not any sort of knee-jerk reaction. We eliminated precisely those dingoes that had become habituated because the number of dingoes that had become habituated were the number of dingoes that were dangerous. It was only those that were going to fearlessly approach people that were going to be dangerous, so we eliminated the main risk at that stage.

What we now have to do is to mop up what remains after we have eliminated those that were, at that time, threatening. That is, we are now dealing at the start with people who are habituating dingoes that were not previously habituated. This is much less of a task than it would have been if we had not got rid of all the habituated dingoes in the first place. We can nip the problem in the bud, to a certain extent, by eliminating all those dingoes that are showing signs of habituation from now on, and by discouraging people from undertaking the actions that habituate them. We had a whole lot of them. We had 30 dingoes that were habituated to human beings. Now we have started with a clean slate of dingoes that have not been habituated, and what we are trying to do is to prevent that from occurring.

The amount of time and effort that we are spending on that is very, very considerable indeed. The whole focus of the program on Fraser Island has now come to emphasise that issue. As I said to you in the opening statement, we have got 15 camp ground rangers who are there to tell people, whatever language they speak—

**Mr LESTER:** Do you think that is enough to do the job well?

**Mr WELLS:** I believe so, and four dedicated dingo management rangers.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The committee will now adjourn for lunch and the hearing will resume at 1.50 p.m. to continue the examination of the portfolio of Environment. I acknowledge that there is approximately nine minutes of non-government members question time remaining in this block.

Sitting suspended from 12.51 p.m. to 1.53 p.m.

**The CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee E hearing is now resumed. We will continue the round of questions with nine minutes remaining for non-government members. Firstly, I call the minister.

**Mr WELLS:** By leave, I would like to table some documents that may be of assistance to the honourable member for Keppel. It is the information and education strategy relating to dingoes on Fraser Island specifically. There is the risk assessment, there are brochures, and there is the dingo management strategy. These are recent documents that I put out indicating to people that they should not camp outside the recognised camping areas if they have children. Section four of the management strategy relates to the education strategy that is being implemented. I assure the honourable member that the ideas that he expresses are taken on board. People do not actually have to read these documents in order to know that dingoes are a problem on Fraser Island. The whole thing is done in picture grams. There are illustrations that are obvious. It does not matter what language you speak or whether you speak a language at all; if you just look at the pictures, it will be clear that dingoes constitute a threat on Fraser Island. I table these for the benefit of the honourable member for Keppel and other members.

**The CHAIR:** The committee is agreed that the minister can table these?

**Mr LESTER:** Yes, and I thank the minister for his promptness in answering my queries by tabling the material. I will ask one more question about Fraser Island. Since the implementation of the Fraser Island dingo management strategy, have there been any reported attacks on the island and what action was taken?

**Mr WELLS:** There have been a number of reports since then and the action has been generally the elimination of the dingo that committed the attack. There was one attack recently that received media attention and that related to an English doctor who was attacked by dingoes very late at night out on the beach in circumstances where you might expect to find a dingo. Another attack involved a German cyclist, which was published in the paper very recently. That attack involved the dingo approaching the tent. That was not reported until subsequently. There are other attacks that do not get reported to rangers, we are sure, but whenever anybody does report an attack to a ranger with any information about the dingo that would enable it to be identified, the dingo is destroyed. Furthermore, any dingo that merely shows aggression, like a dingo that recently followed a child around in a township, is destroyed.

**Mr LESTER:** With the publicity that these attacks have had over time, has the department a record of just how many attacks and incidents there have been?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, you asked me that before and I said that I would get that for you. By virtue of the fact that they are not kept separately as attacks and negative interactions, it will be necessary for my department after this event is finished today to go away and compile that information. Also, we would like to provide you with some indication of the degree of severity because, as I said, we proactively destroy dingoes that show any signs of aggression or even habituation. I would like to give you the information that distinguishes between those that actually involved attacks and those that involved proactive action by my department.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to the Great Walks of Queensland project. I notice that question No. 10 indicates that of the \$2 million allocated to the Great Walks of Queensland project you have actually allocated less than half of this and deferred \$1.1 million until this year. Minister, was this a little bit of poor budgeting, did you ask for too much money or is it simply a little bit of interesting management along the line?

**Mr WELLS:** No, it was not a sum of money that was allocated to be spent in a particular year. It was a sum of money that was allocated to be spent over a period of years. In respect of the Great Walks, we are concentrating on half a dozen great walks. Obviously, before you start building the infrastructure you have to work out where you are going to be building the infrastructure. That requires extensive consultation with the local community. There are a number of communities that have to be consulted. Recently I visited the Whitsunday area and had a look at the Conway National Park and the proposed walk. The Conway National Park is a really terrific territory. There is rainforest and reef in close proximity. There are dunes and beaches and walks that go right across the spine of the mountain range or that deviate through interesting valleys. It is really a matter of deciding where is the best place to do it. In the original plan—and this has not changed from the original plan—it was determined that the first thing we would do would involve the community in the consultation phase so as to determine where it was going to be. The reason I mention Conway National Park in particular is that I saw for myself what a hard decision it would be. The tourist industry has to be consulted as well as the local bush walkers. Other people in the

local community simply love the place and consequently you need a consensus as to where the walk is going to be. Those communities that come to a consensus first will move to the construction phase most quickly. The whole reason that it was not given as a recurrent amount of money each year is that it was something that was going to be operating on the basis of a threshold, and the threshold would be passed for construction when it was determined where the walk is going to be. We have had people on the ground conducting the community consultations, doing the layout, and working out what is going to be along the pathway and where. It is \$2 million a year over four different years. It was done specifically like that because my predecessor advised the budget review committee that the money was not going to be all spent in the first year because it was just not that kind of construction project.

**Mr LESTER:** I again refer to question on notice No. 10. You have nearly \$12 million unspent funds in 2001-02. Why are so many projects deferred and why didn't you spend the budget allocation?

**Mr WELLS:** Which line item are you referring to? Which budget allocation are you talking to? Are you still talking about the Great Walks?

**Mr LESTER:** I am talking about the department.

**Mr WELLS:** Can you give me a better fix on what you are talking about? The \$10 million for the Great Walks program—as I said it was \$2 million over the last four years, for each year, but it is not all going to be spent evenly by virtue of the fact that they are capital works that cannot be built until you have actually spent a bit of money conducting consultation to determine where they are going to be built. There will be a different explanation if there is some other delayed expenditure that you identify.

**Mr LESTER:** I will come back to you in the moment on that. I refer to page 11 of the MPS, promoting sustainable use of our natural capital. What does this have to do with sustainable development and what is the government doing in this area?

**Mr WELLS:** Sustainable development is something that the government is very anxious to promote. In order to do that, there were some extremely creative changes under the machinery of government arrangements made by the Premier at the beginning of this term of office. The Environment Department has been given a benefit that no previous minister has ever had. I have a Sustainable Industries Division in my department. The Sustainable Industries Division is not a coercive branch of the department, it is a branch of the department that seeks to work in partnership with industries in order to ensure that world best practice is followed with respect to the use of our natural resources. The truth of the matter is that very often it is actually most economically sound to do the ecologically sound thing. Very frequently, for example in the area of agriculture, if you use biomimicry instead of chemicals there will be a better outcome. Very often, in the area of industry, if you run a clean operation then you will get a win-win for everybody.

I will give you the example of how my Sustainable Industries Division worked with some people who were involved in aquaculture. They actually increased the profitability of that particular aquaculture operation by 40 per cent and at the same time increased the sustainability of the operation dramatically. Another example would be Australia Meat Holdings out Ipswich way. By my department working with those entrepreneurs they were able to get a dramatically improved result for the environment, a dramatically improved result for the company and a dramatically improved result for the preservation of our natural resources. Six hundred additional people will now be capable of being employed there as a result of a company being prepared to adopt the triple bottom line that is advocated by my Sustainable Industries Division. The triple bottom line is that we are seeking an improvement in economic capital as well as an improvement in and protection of our natural capital and our human capital as well. That is the triple bottom line and that is what my Sustainable Industries Division stands for.

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, I draw your attention to something other than dingoes and let us now look at whales. I refer to the management plan as outlined in the MPS and I ask: is there a management plan for whales and is it breached by the alleged behaviour of a certain jets skiers?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, certainly it is. Honourable members would be aware of reports in the media about the behaviour of certain jet skiers who were interfering with the whales that were in the process of migrating to their breeding grounds. The kind of behaviour that they were engaged in is absolutely outrageous and it is behaviour that we will simply not put up with. I have asked my department to put on additional ranger patrols. Those additional patrols will go out on the

weekend and there are rangers out there now. We simply will not put up with this kind of thing. The whales are on their way to their breeding grounds. The management plan provides that those whales should be protected. They are a species that is under significant ecological threat and that are recovering well as a result, in part, of the management plan that was put in place. They are on their way to their breeding grounds and if you disrupt that, not only is it very impolite to do that to anyone, but if you do that to a species that is on its way to extinction then it is simply not on.

Irresponsible jet skiers are the hoons of the sea. We have ways of dealing with them. We can prosecute them with a fine of up to \$9,000 for a very serious offence. They are on-the-spot fines. Those on-the-spot fines will be applied mordantly. We will fine them on the beaches, we will fine them on the landing grounds, we will fine them on the sea and on the foam. We will never surrender. This is behaviour that we simply will not put up with. Let me be very, very serious for a moment. This is not a culture of hoons and jocks here in Queensland; this is a civilisation and one of the foremost civilisations in the world. One of the hallmarks of a civilisation is how it treats its natural heritage. These great gentle giants of the sea have been given our protection and we will enforce that protection and we will not allow irresponsible jet skiers to behave irresponsibly towards a threatened species. If they do, the irresponsible jet skiers will themselves be a threatened species.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 12 of the MPS you mention implementation of the Solar Cooler Schools program. Can you update the committee on progress with this initiative and the community benefits that it brings?

**Mr WELLS:** The Solar Cooler Schools program is an icon program. We have seventeen schools in the Solar Cooler Schools program. The MPS says that there were six. Actually, in my introductory statement I said that so far there are six. I actually omitted the fact that there are two more that have just come on line, so there are actually eight in the Cooler Schools program. The enormous advantage of the Solar Cooler Schools program is not just ecological. It reduces the reliance of a school on grid electricity. It also, however, adds to the educational and environmental consciousness of the children at that school, because they can sit at their computer and see how much electricity is flowing in and out from the grid. It teaches them a degree of environmental awareness that is not otherwise available. To be frank, I hope that the 17 solar cooler schools will be a pilot program.

We are not yet at the stage where solar electricity is sufficiently economical that we would want to put it in everywhere. It is actually cheaper to operate on grid electricity in most circumstances. But beyond the grid it is actually more economical to use solar power. As we get economies of scale from increased take-up, it becomes more economic. This might not be in the next couple of years, but I hope that our pilot program will show the way so that at some future time we will be able to offer a much larger contract to a supplier on the provision that the supplier comes to Queensland and establishes a solar factory here so that we are producers of this smart technology. Eventually, I hope that we will get a sufficient concatenation of events that it will give it an impetus. We will have an industry here that will become viable, that will become economic. Queensland is an excellent place to have solar power, particularly in the drier areas of the outback. It is terribly valuable.

To correct the MPS—there was not a mistake in it; it is just that this is more recent information—there are eight solar cooler schools. The last two are Aspley Special School and the school at Jacobs Well. I make it clear to any investigative journalists or CMC operatives that when I was Minister for Education and gave Jacobs Well Environmental Education Centre a boat—and when I decided that they would be one of the ones to get this program—I did not know that one of my children was going on a school camp with his school to that particular school.

**Mr POOLE:** On page three of the MPS reference is made to ensuring that Queenslanders live in a clean environment where pollution and waste are minimised. Will the minister inform the committee of steps the EPA has taken to ensure that waste and pollution are minimised? How are any benefits to Queensland delivered in line with the government's Smart State agenda?

**Mr WELLS:** This is my opportunity to provide to the committee further information about the state of recycling in Queensland. The news is good. There has been a quite significant and indeed a quite dramatic improvement in the amount of material in Queensland that is recycled. The report that I have tabled today shows that community organisations, local governments and people generally are cooperating in order to improve outcomes, reduce costs and get more recycling. Queenslanders recycled more than 141,000 tonnes of waste material through kerbside recycling bins and drop-off centres in 2000-01. There was 5,500 tonnes of steel and aluminium

cans, more than 40,000 tonnes of glass bottles, 8,000 tonnes of plastic bottles and a huge 68,000 tonnes of newsprint and magazines. Some time ago I mentioned the *Courier-Mail* production centre. The extent of its recycling of its material is very impressive indeed and exceeds that of overseas locations by factors of whole numbers. The saying used to be that today's news is tomorrow's fish and chip wrapper. Today's news is actually 40 per cent of tomorrow's newspaper if we buy that newspaper in Queensland. I congratulate that industry particularly. Queenslanders are recycling 43 kilograms of material each year, compared to 22 kilograms in 1997. I invite John Cole to add to what I just said.

**Dr COLE:** The report that the minister refers to, the State of Waste and Recycling, also highlights the amount of green waste, commercial and industrial waste, construction waste and sewage sludge being landfilled and recycled. With all of that, we have a baseline towards the ultimate goal of sustainability. The report shows, however, that there is still some way to go, with just 35 per cent of potentially recyclable materials being recycled by householders. This means that for every aluminium can being recycled, another two cans are thrown away and end up in landfills. Through its Waste Wise initiative, the EPA is implementing public place recycling projects and programs to assist Queensland industry to recycle more of the waste that it produces. The State of Waste and Recycling report provides a detailed snapshot of waste and recycling generation and recycling systems across Queensland and will become a useful tool to help plan and manage waste and recycling needs and policy. The report not only shows the overall quantities of materials being diverted from landfill but highlights the best performing local governments, offering an insight into how the most efficient systems operate.

Rockhampton residents are to be congratulated on their enthusiastic participation in recycling and waste avoidance as they each recycled 107 kilograms over the year, over twice the state average. This report shows for the first time where Queenslanders are right now and sets us firmly in the right direction on the road to sustainability. The people of Rockhampton are showing us all how to keep regional cities competitive in this new paradigm of interaction among society, economy and environment. As the report becomes an annual feature of better waste management and decision making in our state, other winners and trends will emerge. Together, we will proceed further along the path to sustainability.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** The issue of lyngbya is of great interest to me and the Pumicestone electorate. Will the minister advise the committee of the current situation in relation to lyngbya occurrences?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, there have been a number of isolated lyngbya occurrences, very widely spread geographically, this year. I might mention half a dozen significant ones: Maroom and Amity Banks in the eastern bay of Moreton Bay, near the mouth of the Brisbane River, some off Redland Bay, a small patch off Coochiemudlo, an occurrence in Shoalwater Bay and an occurrence off Fraser Island. The behaviour of this organism is becoming less and less explicable, because many of these occurrences that took place in the last season are in circumstances dramatically different from those that took place in Deception Bay adjacent to the member's electorate and to mine. The ecological circumstances of Deception Bay were affected by a number of scientific variables that we thought we had isolated. None of these are relevant in the area off Fraser Island. It is not obvious that they are resident at Shoalwater Bay.

We now need to look at a whole set of sufficient conditions for the production of lyngbya which might not be overlapping. It is very clear that there is no one single necessary condition that will lead to the outbreak of lyngbya. The interesting thing is that some of these outbreaks of lyngbya have been completely non-toxic. The one in Deception Bay that the member and I know very well indeed was extremely toxic, but most of the rest of these were not toxic or were not toxic to anything like that extent. It remains a mystery. We are still undertaking the scientific study of it and of course are still undertaking the clean-up. I will give the people of Queensland an undertaking that should their homes or the areas adjacent to their homes be invaded by this material, we will dedicate the funds and work with local government to effect a clean-up. I also give an undertaking that we will continue to work scientifically in order to try to find what the very complex set of conditions must be that bring about the production of lyngbya.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, you referred to the pfiesteria organism in your opening statement and said that tests have been carried out to determine its presence. Can you advise the committee what the EPA has done to deal with this problem?

**Mr WELLS:** As soon as it appeared, I asked departmental officers to do some tests to find out the ambience of this thing. As I said in answer to a question without notice to the honourable member for Keppel in the parliament recently, this is an entity which is ambient in the

environment. It is there all the time in the brackish waters of estuarine environments throughout the world. It is not something that is peculiar to Queensland and it is not something that is peculiar to Australia. My department had a look and, as I indicated in the opening statement, the findings were negative for a number of areas that we checked out. The tests were done in the following areas—I promised in my answer to the honourable member for Keppel to come back to him with an update on this information, and this is it; I thought I would tell you today if you came and, if not, I would have sent you a letter—

**Mr LESTER:** Are you suggesting that I am not diligent?

**Mr WELLS:** No, it is just that you were not on the list to come. A party like this would not be the same without you and we were hoping that you would be here. The tests were done in the North Pine River, Cabbage Tree Creek, the Caboolture River, the Coomera River, and the Brisbane River at the Centenary Bridge and St Lucia. The findings were negative in areas other than where they had previously been found to be positive. The American scientist who did the test I think was probably testing the hypothesis that this thing is endemic everywhere in brackish waters of estuaries, and he certainly found that it was here and also in Western Australia.

I would like to make it very clear that this thing is not like a germ that can infect people. It becomes motile only in circumstances where there is going to be some evolutionary benefit for it. Human beings are not one of the creatures to which it attaches itself. Nor is there any evidence that if it attaches itself to a fish this creature will infect the fish in any such way that it will be inappropriate to eat. The picture I am trying to paint is of something that is there all the time, just like the bacteria that you have in your body. These bacteria do not become a problem unless they grow out of control. That is how it is with pfiesteria. It is not a problem for the environment unless it becomes motile in large numbers and grows out of control. There is no evidence that that has happened in Queensland and there is no evidence that the environmental conditions in Queensland duplicate those in places in America where that has happened.

**Mr POOLE:** I have heard you refer to the quadruple bottom line in the parliament. It would appear that the MPS deals only with the traditional single bottom line. Can you advise the committee what the quadruple bottom line concept is and how it is being implemented by EPA?

**Mr WELLS:** The quadruple bottom line refers to productive capital, human capital, natural capital and social capital. It is widely recognised that business operates on the basis of a figure for a single bottom line, generally speaking. Businesses and governments the world over have to work on the basis of revenue and expenditure. If you look at a particular initiative, how much it will cost and how much revenue it will bring in are the only questions that are usually asked, but there are other relevant questions. Just as it is possible to quantify our budget, it is also possible to quantify our natural capital, our human capital and social capital. To quantify our natural capital you have only to do the exercise that the World Bank undertook in 1986 and in subsequent papers. In that year the World Bank did a quantification of the natural capital available to each country. It was an approximation and admitted by the World Bank to be an approximation. Nevertheless, it was able, by estimating the value and quality of the natural environments in a particular country and the mineral resources, agricultural land and forestry land, to draw an approximation of the natural capital available to each country.

Every year the United Nations does a Human Development Index. In that index it estimates the improvement in the value of human capital. It uses a number of criterion, including those relating to education—the number of people educated to year 12—and the extent of infant mortality in a community and the number of people likely to live beyond the age of 80 in a particular community. These estimates are already available for natural and human capital. Robert Putnam, the American sociologist, was in Queensland recently lecturing about social capital. There is a general consensus that social capital has gone from a new and dubious concept to one that has a considerable degree of rigour attached to it. The consensus is that you can estimate the extent of social capital in a community by estimating the extent of the community's capacity to work with one another. An indicator of that would be the number of voluntary organisations in a community. In a community where there are no voluntary organisations and nobody does anything voluntarily where you have no social capital, such as the inner suburban slums of the United States and Russia, the only organisation that is viable is a criminal organisation. In those places where you have vibrant social capital you have a very healthy economy. The economic consequences of all of these things are quite clear.

I asked my department to conduct some extensive research with a view to attempting to quantify the human, natural and social capital available to Queensland and to articulate the extent to which the measures that we are taking will lead to an improvement in the human, social

and natural capital of our community. It is blinkered thinking to think that you can continue to run forever on just one single bottom line. The world is much more complex than that. It is time now, in the 21st century, that we started getting together some measurements that actually depict the world as it is rather than how it might appear through the blinkered eyepiece of some economic rationalist out of some think tank in Canberra or Sydney.

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

**Mr LESTER:** At the opening of parliament in 1998 it was stated in the Governor's Opening Speech that the Beattie government would appoint a commission for sustainable development. Why did that commission not eventuate and how much money did you spend on not developing it?

**Mr WELLS:** It did. We have a Sustainable Industries Division. You actually asked me a question a little while ago to which I reluctantly gave you some information about the Sustainable Industries Division. I am the only minister in Australia, I think, who is fortunate enough to have a Sustainable Industries Division. The fact that we call it a division instead of a commission is neither here nor there. What is in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet. Dr John Cole smells very much the same whether he is a commissioner or an executive director. The Sustainable Industries Division has a brief which goes very far beyond the briefs that other sections of my department have. It actually fulfils the functions of a sustainable industries commission. I would invite John to give the committee a run-down on some of the activities of his department, concentrating on partnerships with industry and on research that is undertaken.

**Dr COLE:** The Sustainable Industries Division came into being on 15 December 1998. It is a unique voluntary initiative by the EPA set up to assist Queensland industry invest, compete and profit sustainably. We are a division that works with industry and the community in partnership. We complement the regulatory function of the EPA and our goal is to promote a better understanding of environmental factors as they influence business development, community environmental performance and the general quest for sustainable development. We are organised into six business units. We have a Sustainable Resources Systems and Technology Unit, which focuses on what might otherwise be called waste minimisation. We have a Sustainable Energy Systems and Technology Unit, which promotes renewable energy and comprises much of the former Office of Sustainable Energy. We have a Sector Strategies Group which works with 28 industry associations across Queensland and imparts various grants—the Greenhouse Industry Partnerships Program and the Cleaner Production Program. At the moment, more than 400 Queensland companies in one way or another are working or have worked through the sector partnerships area. The other area is the Sustainable Water Systems and Technology area. That particular unit is responsible for rolling out the Queensland Water Recycling Strategy and, of course, delivers the well-known Water Wise program.

**Mr LESTER:** Are you saying that a section of your department can be as effective as a full commission?

**Mr WELLS:** Absolutely. The Sustainable Industries Division comprises, as a result of the machinery of government changes that took place at the beginning of this term of office, the Office of Energy, the Office of Sustainable Industries, Water Wise, elements of DNR, EPA and the department of minerals and energy. We have a \$113 million investment in promoting the sustainable use of our natural capital. Bringing all of those elements together is the fulfilment of that election undertaking. I do not know what would change if I changed Dr John Cole's title to commissioner. If it was something that you really badly wanted me to do, you know I would think about doing it. John, would you be prepared to have a change of title?

**Dr COLE:** If it means a pay rise, Minister.

**Mr WELLS:** Do you see what you have got me into, Vince? Now he is asking for a pay rise.

**Mr LESTER:** Without implicating this very learned public servant—and he has given very good answers today—he has just indicated that he would need a pay rise; it would have to be far more important as a commission. We will not pursue that. What budget has been set aside for this section of the department?

**Mr WELLS:** Do you mean the budget of the Sustainable Industries Division?

**Mr LESTER:** Yes, I do.

**Mr WELLS:** I think it is something like \$30 million.

**Mr LESTER:** Is that what would have been put aside if it had been a commission—including the pay rise for the officer?

**Mr WELLS:** No, if it had been a commission it would have been an independent statutory body that would be going off on flights of fancy that you would not have given very much money to, because it would have been purely a research body. What we have is a division that contains that capacity. It is a commission in the sense that it does everything that a commission does. But if you were to set up something to be called a commission that was just going to be a piece of window-dressing that just did research, it would have been very much less—a couple of million.

**Mr LESTER:** I note from page 12 of the MPS your very worthwhile aspirations to reduce waste in the bait packaging and whitebait sale industry, and I ask: what are you doing to reduce waste in the vegetable processing industry?

**Mr WELLS:** They, like everybody else, are recipients of information that we send out about waste reduction programs. They, like everybody else, are subject to local government regulations relating to waste programs. They, like everybody else, are involved in the education programs that the Sustainable Industries Division does.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer again to MPS page 12. Similarly, what are you doing to reduce industry waste in the dairy industry, feedlotting industry, et cetera? Why is it that only one industry received any mention in your 'Future developments'? Could you please detail your plans to reduce industry waste in both urban and rural industries and provide a breakdown when possible?

**Mr WELLS:** A breakdown of what?

**Mr LESTER:** What you are doing relating to the question.

**Mr WELLS:** Right. In order to reduce industry waste, we have a strategy, which I have tabled. That is the key and main thing that we are doing at the moment. It is the key new initiative. I have tabled that today and will not go over that ground again. In addition, we are trying to simplify the red tape which encumbers local governments. What we are doing there is being done by regulatory reform to reduce the red tape that they are burdened by. Of course, we in the Environmental Protection Agency do not mind red tape ourselves. We recycle it, but other people do not and so we are trying to get rid of it for everybody else. The department also monitors the production of waste. If you would like to hear a little bit about toxic waste, I can indicate to you that we have had a significant number of prosecutions of people under the reconfiguration of the Environmental Protection Agency for the improper disposal of toxic waste. These things are monitored more or less constantly with a great degree of success.

My department also enters into partnerships with industries such as agricultural industries and urban based industries in order to achieve eco-efficiency. Sometimes those partnerships involve a sum of money being provided by the department in order that they can introduce some eco-efficiency. We are currently working with Darling Downs feedlots on sullage management. We are currently working, as I said before, with AMH and have got really good results with it. I have recently visited a number of industries, including aquaculture industries, where we are working in order to ensure that wastes are not produced in a way that is going to contaminate the environment. We have partnerships with fruit and vegetable growers and with plastic manufacturers.

Recently, I visited a small enterprise on the north side of Brisbane where wastes were being recycled in a way that had not occurred elsewhere. Those particular wastes were a particular kind of plastic which, until then, had not been recycled and the product was being contained only in recycled materials. So there is an infinite range of things that my department is doing.

**Mr LESTER:** Minister, I presume that in what you have tabled all aspects of my question have been answered. I also refer to AMH. It is doing a good job. I have been to a number of its abattoirs and it is setting a benchmark for some other organisations. I refer to page 17 of the MPS and your projected anti-litter strategy. How much do you intend to spend on this project? How do you intend to implement it short of running along and picking up rubbish?

**Mr WELLS:** I was aware that you had been out to AMH, actually. I had heard that you had visited there and that you were impressed with the place. I am very glad about that, because it was something that my department spent a lot of time on. It was a situation that could have ended up in a loss for everybody, but because of the intervention of my department it ended up in a win. The anti-litter strategy is one of those strategies that is in the process of being formulated. We are in consultations with respect to it at the moment and the amount of money that will be made available for it will be dependent on what component parts of the strategies it is determined to implement. This is work in progress. Some of the funding for that program will be coming in next year, so I cannot tell you because this is about this year's budget.

**Mr LESTER:** So at the moment you are implementing it. I refer to ensuring a clean environment. How many complaints about industrial pollution—and I want a breakdown of urban and rural industrial pollution—did the EPA receive over the last year? How many prosecutions did this result in?

**Mr WELLS:** There were 32 prosecutions. All of those prosecutions resulted, I am advised, in a conviction. There were, I think, 115. I am just going by memory here, but I will just check it for you as we speak. Sorry, there were 160 fines and two prison sentences. I might say that it gives me no joy to note the incarceration of anybody, however deserving it might be. But when we are talking about a degree of environmental pollution which is wilful and which the person who is perpetrating that environmental pollution is quite remorseless about and continues to do notwithstanding a number of pieces of advice from my department that they should not do it, then there really is no alternative. So those are the statistics. There have been 32 prosecutions, 160 fines and two prison sentences. I will invite my departmental officer, John Gilmour, to come forward to give you more of the mechanical details of that.

**Mr LESTER:** You might advise how many complaints, please.

**Mr GILMOUR:** As the minister indicated, we did undertake 32 successful prosecutions this year. You would be aware that our department manages a broad range of environmental issues, so that was under the Environmental Protection Act, the Nature Conservation Act, the Forestry Act and also some marine park legislation. The enforcement in our department is not just about prosecution; it is also about, as the minister said, the issue of infringement notices. There were fines totalling \$125,000 in infringement notices under the Forestry Act. We also issued infringement notices relating to the Nature Conservation Act of \$22,000. We also issued 53 infringement notices under the Marine Parks Act. The department also prosecuted 275 infringement notices related to the Recreation Areas Management Act, which covers Fraser Island. Of the 610 infringement notices issued by the EPA, only four were contested in court and of those all resulted in convictions.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to MPS page 27 and the 'Statement of cash flows'. It does not appear that where the fines are actually levied is mentioned in the MPS, which makes it extremely difficult for us to scrutinise whether the fines process is worth pursuing or whether the legislative and operational arms are working cohesively. How much was raised in fines from these prosecutions?

**Mr WELLS:** It is \$160,000.

**Mr LESTER:** How much?

**Mr WELLS:** It is \$160,000 in fines. There were 14 prosecutions under the Forestry Act with fines of \$17,250, eight under the Nature Conservation Act with fines of \$20,160, three under the Marine Parks Act with fines totalling \$3,800 and seven under the Environmental Protection Act 1994 with fines of \$119,000. I think that that comes to \$160,000. I said to you that there was \$160,000 worth of fines. I think those add up to \$160,000. You asked, I think, how many complaints.

**Mr LESTER:** Yes, I did.

**Mr WELLS:** I would like to make it clear that at any time when I referred to the figure of 160 that meant \$160,000. In relation to the total number of complaints, it is a bit of a meaningless figure, but it is probably about 9,000. The reason it is a meaningless figure is that it includes all complaints. Many of them are complaints of nuisance. Some of them are vexatious complaints. Others of them are complaints to the wrong agency. Some are things which should have gone to the police, some to the local council and so forth. If you want an overall figure for complaints, 9,000 complaints took place.

**Mr LESTER:** I do accept that some are a little malicious at times. What is the cost of levying these industrial pollution fines—

**Mr WELLS:** Excuse me. I am sorry to interrupt you, but I have just been advised that in relation to infringement notices as distinct from fines there is more money coming yet on top of that. Sorry about that. Please start again.

**Mr LESTER:** What is the cost of administering and levying these industrial pollution fines?

**Mr WELLS:** I suppose if the revenue that was obtained by the fines was the only outcome of it, you could appropriately say that it was the cost of the salaries of the people who are involved in doing the work. But in fact that is not the only output that you get as a result of people going out and administering the fines. The fines are there not just to get revenue. The fines are there also to set a standard of behaviour and a quality of environment that we expect to be able to

maintain. The fines are not the point of the whole thing. The fines are just the sharp end of the enforcement of a system which enables us all to enjoy the quality of environment that we are now in.

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

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, on page 2 of the MPS you refer to the continued development of the Great Walks of Queensland project. Can you outline the benefits that will flow to communities from these projects?

**Mr WELLS:** There are enormous benefits from the Great Walks of Queensland program. It benefits the locals who have the capacity to appreciate the extremely beautiful place in which they live. It benefits the local tourist industry and gives it an extra—to use its barbaric terminology—product to sell. I hate to think of our magnificent national parks as products, but that is how it is often referred to. It also enables many people from around the world to come and appreciate the beauties of this country. I have said quite a bit about that program already. We have the Great Walks program going. We are intending to have Great Walks in the Blackall Range, in the Gold Coast hinterland, Fraser Island, the Mackay highlands, the Whitsundays and the Wet Tropics. I would like to ask one of my departmental officers to come and give some more information about the roll-out of the program, though I have extensively referred to that \$10 million program already.

**Mr FEELY:** As we said, the Great Walks of Queensland initiative is \$10 million over five years with the aim of creating a world-class system of walking tracks and other low-impact facilities for visitors to the prominent parks and forests in Queensland. The project commenced in July last year. The minister has spoken about where the walks will be. The walks will provide an opportunity for Queensland families as well as tourists to see some of the most special and spectacular parts of the state on long-distance tracks. The tracks will also be set up in such a way that there are shorter walks as part of a long-distance track. Announcements on the routes for each of the walks should occur in the coming months. Construction of tracks commenced in June 2002 and will continue in a staged manner until June 2006.

Each Great Walks project is undertaken in close consultation with the local authorities and communities in the planning and development of where it may go. There has been a lot of interest in them. We have done a statewide marketing strategy for how we will make sure that we get the most out of them for the state and the people of Queensland. The government policy Art Built In also will be implemented through the Great Walks of Queensland. We are currently looking at that. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that the cultural and artistic expertise is integral in the shaping of our environment and will influence the spirit of the place. In summary, the Great Walks project aims to position Queensland as an internationally recognised destination for premier walking tracks, and it will achieve that.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 1 of the MPS you refer to partnerships with industry and the community to encourage the use of renewable energy, greater eco-efficiency and environmental innovation. Can you provide the committee with examples of these partnerships and what environmental benefits they have delivered?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, sure. I will invite Dr John Cole to give a list of a number of the partnerships that he has had. The Queensland Sustainable Energy Innovation Fund has been accessed by a number of people who have been working in the area of alternative and renewable energy. I mentioned a little while ago that the EPA fleet is now on ethanol. I also mentioned that we are the first government in Australia to actually become a bulk buyer of ethanol in order to kick-start our market and add credibility to that particular product. The vast majority of government vehicles have been cleared to use ethanol as of today. John, would you like to add some details about some of the partners you have had?

**Dr COLE:** The minister has emphasised the renewable energy side of our business. We are also working with Queensland industry, particularly to emphasise the financial savings that come with better environmental performance. The EPA works with many industry sectors, including agribusiness and food processing, manufacturing, construction, tourism and hospitality. Two key examples of the partnerships with peak industry organisations are those we have with Commerce Queensland and the Australian Industry Group. A three-way partnership between the EPA, the Australian Greenhouse Office and Commerce Queensland has seen this important peak industry body establish an environmental services unit to assist CQ members to appreciate the business benefits of improved environmental performance. So far this partnership has also led to 80 voluntary eco-efficiency assessments, identifying significant greenhouse gas emission reduction

opportunities, and energy, water and financial savings; water audits for Queensland's top 28 water users, identifying potential annual savings of 272 megalitres of water; the introduction of a monthly newsletter on eco-efficiency issues for the 1,200 members of Commerce Queensland; and business education activities, including workshops, seminars and training sessions, a good example of which were the environment management systems seminars we ran with partners in the agribusiness sector last year.

The EPA also has a partnership with the Australian Industry Group to help its members save money by improving their environmental performance. This partnership specifically targets the metal fabrication and food processing sectors. The partnership has resulted in the completion of three food sector audits and the development of fact sheets, including for companies like Capilano honey, which identified environmental improvements potentially resulting in annual cost savings of \$100,000, and Harvest Fresh Cuts, which identified environmental savings potentially in the order of \$330,000 annually.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, on page 9 of the MPS reference is made to the tenure allocation process as part of the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement implementation. Can the minister explain to the committee how local communities have been involved in the recommendations for the final tenure and what benefits to nature conservation have been gained by the SEQFA?

**Mr WELLS:** The South-East Queensland Forest Agreement was of course one of the great outcomes of our previous term of government. What it has resulted in is that 425,000 hectares have been transferred to forest reserve at this stage. Nearly all of this is of high conservation value forests. That is a terrific outcome for the government to have achieved—to have saved so much forest land in one fell swoop. The process that we are going through now is the process of determining the tenure that is appropriate to that piece of land so that we can get an appropriate balance between scientific use, recreational use and conservation use. I will ask one of my officers to give some more technical details about the roll-out. I ask Olwyn Crimp to speak to the committee.

**Ms CRIMP:** Yes, the tenure allocation process for the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement puts a lot of emphasis on community involvement. The process centres on focus group meetings where the EPA and community information is shared, where issues are identified, analysed together and balanced outcomes are jointly developed. As to the initial recommendations—currently seven tenure recommendations have been made. These initial recommendations reflect an average of six meetings per area and in total have directly engaged well over 200 representatives of community interests, including local government, conservation groups, local progress associations, historical groups, indigenous groups, recreational interests and beekeepers.

Apart from the diverse community interests directly engaged in the focus group, staff also meet frequently with peak groups, clubs and associations as required to resolve emergent and detailed issues. The SEQFA implementation process is not only an efficient means of preparing tenure recommendations with community participation but concurrently develops management and planning, enables effective preplanning for operational management of each area and sets a firm foundation for the continuing working relationship between the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service and the local communities and interests. The partnership approach fostered by the SEQFA implementation process promotes and is a tangible demonstration of the commitments made in the master plan for the Queensland parks system to develop partnerships with the community at large and especially with local communities. The SEQFA will significantly enhance the quality of south-east Queensland water catchments also through protection of the vegetation and landscapes.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, in view of the importance of water to our economy and our environment, can you explain to the committee how Queensland will benefit from the water recycling strategy mentioned on page 12 of the MPS?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes, I released the water recycling strategy some time ago. It is a long-term plan in order that we can deal with a long-term problem. Queensland is situated in the world's driest continent; and although it is not the driest of the states, nevertheless water is terribly important to us. We are expecting a dramatic increase in the Queensland population in the next couple of decades, and it is incredibly important that we should conserve the water without which we cannot live or grow anything or conduct any sort of recognisably human life. We have had some really good outcomes with water conservation. In Wide Bay—for example, in Hervey Bay—100 per cent of the effluent from that city is now reused and sent into agricultural recycling. A large proportion

of the harvested stormwater has also gone into irrigation. As a result of this kind of initiative one farm went from being the lowest yield property to being the highest yield property in the area.

Recently, I went as the guest of canegrowers to a number of their best practice sites. I visited one farm where no water comes in from the river and no water goes out into the river. It is all harvested from the sky and it is recycled around and around the farm, purified by the natural elements as it does so—a closed system. These kinds of innovations are going to be absolutely essential. That is why my Sustainable Industries Division worked with a number of city councils, including the Brisbane City Council. Honourable members who are aware of the recent announcement by the Brisbane City Council that it is going to move into water storage tanks would be pleased to know that that was something that was done in cooperation with my department on the basis in part of advice provided by my department and as a result of subsidy. My department will be throwing money into this program in order to help them along their way. I would like to ask one of my officers to say a little bit more about the water recycling strategies that we have. Again, it is Dr John Cole.

**Dr COLE:** The minister has referred to Hervey Bay. Another good example of water recycling and conservation is the use of 4,000 million litres a year of recycled water by the BP oil refinery for production in its clean fuels project here in Brisbane. One of the major benefits of implementing the water recycling strategy is the potential to defer or eliminate the need for the wrong type of water infrastructure. The savings from harvesting alternative water resources can be used for job creation and development, especially in regional areas. It is not difficult to show that water recycling together with demand management and water efficiency can create more jobs and wealth than traditional approaches.

A good example of what is happening in regional Queensland at the innovation end is the work that the EPA has facilitated at Agnes Water, where a 32-unit beachfront development there will avoid more than four million litres of polluted water by being water and energy self-sufficient. These are good examples of our roll-out of the strategy. Indeed, other developers are now learning from that, and there are signs in parts of south-east Queensland, particularly out near Springfield, that similar developments might occur in the future.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, in light of the recent decision by the Commonwealth government to list the spectacled flying fox as vulnerable to extinction, and given that the matter of flying fox control and the issuing of damage mitigation permits has been a concern for farmers, on page 6 of the MPS you mention native species maintenance and enhancement. Can you inform the committee how these competing outcomes are managed?

**Mr WELLS:** Obviously in this area it is a question of balance. But the balance has now been tilted in a way that the state government cannot handle it. The reason for that is because it has gone to a large extent into the Commonwealth domain. The farmers who are concerned about the flying foxes now, as a result of these recent legal developments that I will mention in a moment, really have to take their concerns to the Commonwealth government. The Commonwealth government has listed the spectacled flying fox and the grey-headed flying fox as vulnerable under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act of the Commonwealth.

Under the Australian Constitution, where a law of a state and a law of the Commonwealth cover the same territory then the law of the state is nugatory to the extent of any inconsistency with the Commonwealth law. To put that another way, where there is a conflict between the law of the state and the law of the Commonwealth then the law of the Commonwealth prevails to the extent of the inconsistency. So it really would not matter what I or the whole of the rest of the Queensland government would say about it; nothing can change the fact that the Commonwealth government has said that those species have a certain capacity for protection. If you actually read the Boswell case in the Federal Court you will see that the court indicated that it was within the capacity of the Minister for Environment at Commonwealth level to make a determination as to whether damage mitigation activities could be undertaken by farmers, but it is clearly not within the capacity of the state minister.

I could not issue a damage mitigation permit in respect of those species if I wished to. It is just not open to me, or to the honourable member for Keppel or the honourable member for Callide if they happened to be in government. It is not open to them by virtue of the fact that a decision has been made by an Australian court and a decision has been made under the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act.

Having said that, the department can work with farmers in order to provide them with assistance to develop non-lethal methods of dealing with flying foxes. My department has provided a great deal of information. My department's view is that the most effective things will be nets. Things such as Shu-Roos and other means of scaring them off can be used, but the nets will be most effective because I understand they add 30 per cent to the crop. Thirty per cent in additional takings from a crop when I was at school would pay for itself in a little more than three years.

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

**Mr LESTER:** Minister, thank you for the answers to the questions on notice. I am a little disappointed with some of these answers in that they do not address what I asked. I will give you a couple of examples. I refer to question on notice No. 3. I asked how many officers in your department are currently directly involved with the clean-up operation and rejuvenation of Moreton Bay and what their tasks are. Instead you provided me with a list of officers involved in marine park planning and operations, coastal management and licensing officers. Could you now please provide me with the list of officers who work directly on the clean-up and regeneration of Moreton Bay, as I originally asked?

**Mr WELLS:** But I have. In part (d) of the question I have said 10 professional officers, nine technical officers and 1.5 administration officers. I cannot give you name, rank and serial number.

**Mr LESTER:** I do not want their names. You have not specifically talked about Moreton Bay. You provided a general answer. Are these people all working on Moreton Bay alone? Is that part of it? What is the deal?

**Mr WELLS:** We do not put people on a particular site and say, 'Sport, that's where you are for good.' We give people a variety in employment. It is part of job enrichment.

**Mr LESTER:** What proportion of work is being done on Moreton Bay?

**Mr WELLS:** Are you referring to question 4 or question 3? I am looking at question 3.

**Mr LESTER:** It is question 3(d). We asked you about Moreton Bay. As you have said, the EPA now has 20.5 full-time officers. You talk about going up and down the coast and all sorts of things.

**Mr WELLS:** Question 3 is about Pfiesteria. Is that what you mean? In answer to question 4(d) I said that 30 full-time staff officers are employed in coastal planning, licensing, investigations and marine park planning operations, contributing to the enhancement of one of the world's great marine parks. Is that the question you are referring to?

**Mr LESTER:** You have it there in front of you. We asked about Moreton Bay.

**Mr WELLS:** Question 3 relates to all Queensland waterways. Question 4 relates to Moreton Bay and the surrounding area. With respect to question 4 the answer is 30. With respect to question 3 the answer is 10 professional, nine technical and 1.5 administration. I am sorry, Vince. I sit up at night by the light of a guttering candle, listening to the murmuring of the breezes and the sighs of my children, trying to work out ways to satisfy you. But I do not know what more I can do than give you these numbers.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 4. I clearly asked for a breakdown of the money that has been allocated for the purpose of water monitoring, research and clean-up programs in the Moreton Bay area each year over the past five years. Could you please provide this information? I will take that on notice if you like, but at the moment I would like a breakdown of how much money the state government contributed in the last financial year to the Moreton Bay clean-up and how much has been allocated to this project in the forthcoming financial year.

**Mr WELLS:** Just hang on a moment. It is getting difficult, Vince, because at one time you asked for five years and the next time you asked for three years, and it all depends on which five years and which three years. I will take the question on notice and I will give you the answer by the end of this question time.

**Mr LESTER:** So we are talking about the last five years, last year and what we are doing for the forthcoming year.

**Mr WELLS:** Okay. If you give me a few moments, my officers will work out the figures over the particular time that you want.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 4. How much was contributed by the Commonwealth, local government and industry groups last financial year? How much is it anticipated will be contributed in this financial year?

**Mr WELLS:** We will come back to you. It is a matter of working it out.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to part (a) of question on notice No. 4. It refers to a regionally focused catchment and waterways research project. What proportion is the state government's contribution to the Moreton Bay healthy waterways partnership in dollar and percentage terms, for both last year and this financial year?

**Mr WELLS:** Same answer. We will give it to you all at once.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer again to part (a) of question on notice No. 4. What has been the cost of the Moreton Bay healthy waterways partnership to this state and what has the partnership actually done?

**Mr WELLS:** What has it done?

**Mr LESTER:** What do you believe you have achieved by it?

**Mr WELLS:** The whole thing about the partnership is that it brings together a whole lot of people who have the capacity to do something in the area of cleaning up our waterways. It also involves the entire community. So we have local governments and we have the state government. We have a federal presence. We have non-government organisations. We have everybody present and committed to trying to clean up the waterways.

We get funding inputs from a number of different sources, which is why it is possible for you to have the lack of clarity you have about the figures, because other people made contributions as well. Their contributions are in kind as well as in cash. If you can get that sort of community together you can get results that you would not otherwise get, such as the cessation of dredging in the Brisbane River. That was a significant one which eliminates a major contaminant from Moreton Bay and the Moreton Bay Marine Park. As a result of this concerted action we have had massive upgrades to the sewage treatment plants in Brisbane and elsewhere. The capacity of my department to mandate certain levels of water quality has been used in conjunction with the cooperation of local councils in order to achieve that.

Coordinated catchment management work has enabled us to see the system we are living in as a system rather than as a number of disparate parts. So instead of people thinking of their own little corner of the world as the only place there is, they have thought about the effects an action might have on an adjacent council, for example, or on an adjacent land-holder.

The partnership has been able to work together to achieve lyngbya strategy, for example. In respect of lyngbya research, local councils have put in money. My department has put in money. Natural Resources has put in money. Primary Industries has put in money. As a result of that we have been able to put together a bigger bucket of money in order to do the research which has enabled us to do the things we have been able to do so far concerning lyngbya. We have been able to plan extractive industries and remove litter from waterways, all by working in conjunction. What we have here is a unique collaboration of the three tiers of government actually having an outcome.

**Mr LESTER:** I again refer to question on notice No. 4. You refer to research and monitoring projects that have been carried out over the past five years. In answer to question on notice No. 343 of 16 May this year it was stated that a goal of the South-East Queensland Regional Water Quality Management Strategy was to halt the current environmental decline by 2003. Given that you have less than six months left to achieve this object, can you provide a list of streams, rivers and estuaries in which this has been achieved and a list of those waterways where this outcome is yet to be achieved?

**Mr WELLS:** I said to one of my departmental scientists at one stage, 'If I were really thirsty, where in south-east Queensland would I go to get water out of a river that I could drink?' He went out and did some tests and came back with the results. One was an estuary in Redland Bay; the other was Burpengary Creek, along the borders of my own electorate. In other words, we are making significant progress. It will take a little time to progress to the extent we would like to, and I suppose you can always do something a little better. We have a long-term plan. I do not know offhand what the reference you are making to 2003 is. Each year we hope that we get a little better. All of the indications are that we are making some improvement.

The documents the partnership puts out indicating that there is some kind of problem remaining in particular river systems are essential. You need to know where the problems are. Obviously it will be the case that the problems rather than the solutions are highlighted. The report card for south-east Queensland's waterways shows improvements each time it comes out. We can table the report card. I am sure you are referring to it. You can always go to those areas of

the report card where we are not getting the highest or the best scores, but the improvement is there, anyway.

By virtue of the fact that we are dealing with an ecosystem here, progress is going to be slow, if not glacial. But progress there is. We are getting results. We are getting improvements. I think that we can be very proud of it. When in 20 years time we get to the stage where we have a river system flowing through our cities in south-east Queensland that looks pretty pristine, then it is going to be due to the fact that all levels of government and the community cooperated together in order to get the outcomes that we are now getting.

**Mr LESTER:** Have we got a list of these rivers yet that you have worked on?

**Mr WELLS:** You just look at a map. The report card has all the rivers on it. There is a map of the area in the appropriate departmental publications which will give you an idea of the area that the partnership covers.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer again to question on notice No. 3. You mentioned that monitoring in the south-east Queensland waterways occurs only on a monthly basis and on some occasions you monitor so-called hot spots. How do you identify these hot spots? Can you provide a list of these hot spots that have been monitored in the past year? How many times have they been monitored?

**Mr WELLS:** Twelve. If it is done on a monthly basis, then there are 12 in the last year.

**Mr LESTER:** Have they all been done on a monthly basis? Are you sure of that?

**Mr WELLS:** I will give you the information. Obviously, I do not have those statistics in my head. I do not think that anybody would have them in their head.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 10. You have nearly \$12 million unspent in the year 2001-02. Why were these projects deferred? Why did you not spend your budget allocation?

**Mr WELLS:** The programs that indicated here in the answer that you have are not deferred. These are parts of a rolling capital works program.

**Mr LESTER:** It does say 'actual deferred from 2001-02 to 2002-03' and it goes on to talk about deferred payments for outputs. Then we go to the National Action Plan for Salinity and so it goes on. That is \$6,315,000. Then we have a deferred equity injection. We can talk about Breaking the Unemployment Cycle, the Great Walks of Queensland, the coastal land acquisition, et cetera—\$5,850,000.

**Mr WELLS:** These are not deferrals in the sense that they are sums of money that were expected to be spent or required to be spent in a particular year. These are parts of a rolling program, some of which transcend any particular year. The National Action Plan for Salinity and the herbarium services, for example, are things that are ongoing. If funding that is available is spent in the second half of the calendar year rather than in the first half the calendar year, this is not money that is going to end up being forfeited or something like that.

**Mr LESTER:** Perhaps your officers are using an unfortunate choice of words, because that is what they say. They say 'deferral'. I refer again to question on notice No. 10. What proportion of the overall projects budget does this \$12 million equate to?

**Mr WELLS:** The overall projects budget? There is a capital works budget of \$22 million. What do you mean by 'projects'? Projects also include the deployment of human resources.

**Mr LESTER:** I am referring to these types of things here. We have grants here, a total of \$25,556,000, and then it goes on to say that some are deferred or, to use your choice of words, carried over, or whatever.

**Mr WELLS:** The sum of money referred to here is four per cent of the budget. What we are talking about here is a set of programs that are overlapping two financial years. This does not constitute a problem.

**Mr LESTER:** Right.

**Mr WELLS:** All sorts of things happen both in June and July.

**Mr LESTER:** In relation to question—

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Gaven.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, on page 8 of the MPS reference is made to expanding the network of nature refuges in Queensland. Can you explain to the committee how this is achieved and what benefits are derived from the program?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. Nature refuges are agreements that are entered into with the government by private land-holders that have the effect that the land-holder is undertaking to keep in its natural pristine state part of their property. This has the advantage of preserving wildlife in that area and, effectively, letting part of that land be part of the preserved estate for all time.

The agreement is one which is taken before the Governor in Council, it becomes an entry on the property of the land-holder, and if the land changes hands at another time, it still remains as a nature refuge. Many land-holders have demonstrated their green credentials by doing this. We have particularly a number of nature refuges that are adjacent to areas of national park. So land-holders who did not want to actually just make a donation of property to the government established a nature refuge adjacent to a national park and thus added to the nature corridors, the wildlife corridors and the ecosystem that is available for the animals and other creatures that live in that area. It has been an extremely valuable program. We have 73 nature refuges covering 35,000 hectares of the state. I would like to ask Olwyn Crimp to come forward and to tell us a little bit more about the roll out of the program.

**Ms CRIMP:** Currently, there are 73 nature refuges with a total of approximately 35,000 hectares. There is another 13 that will soon be gazetted with an area of approximately 18,000 hectares. The EPA is committed to expanding and supporting the nature refuge network. There are currently 16 extension officers employed throughout the state within the community nature conservation program. They are working directly with land-holders to support community based nature conservation. These extension officers support land-holders by providing them with up-to-date technical information and resource information. That includes vegetation mapping for regional ecosystems, technical notes, advice on funding opportunities and whole-farm planning advice. In addition, advice and support includes monitoring programs for pasture quantity and quality, flora and fauna lists, organising field days and the publications *Nature Refuge News* and *Land for Wildlife*.

Extension officers develop individual conservation agreements specific to the needs of individual land-holders so that both conservation and sustainability objectives are addressed. For example, agreements covering grazing properties recognise that both environmental and economic imperatives are strongly linked.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On page 1 of the MPS you refer to the marine parks as part of the protection of our natural assets. Can you inform the committee on progress in delivering the government's commitment to expand Queensland's marine parks network?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. The government's plan is to have a network of marine parks that extends from the Gold Coast to the gulf—from Burketown to Coolangatta. We have made significant progress recently with that. I would like to ask my departmental officer to indicate the roll out of that program, which the government has sought to implement.

**Ms CRIMP:** Recently, there has been an area of interest declared for a marine park in the Great Sandy Region and a discussion paper to promote public discussion regarding this marine park has been released. The proposed Great Sandy Marine Park, the northern section, will incorporate the existing Hervey Bay Marine Park, a designated whale watching area; the Woongarra Marine Park, an important loggerhead turtle rookery; the Great Sandy Straits, which includes a significant Ramsar site for migratory birds; and the waters surrounding the World Heritage listed Fraser Island.

We have established a community based Great Sandy Marine Park northern section working group, a whole-of-government reference group as well as a scientific reference group. Advice from these groups will provide the basis for a zoning plan. It is expected that this Great Sandy Marine Park, the northern section, will be declared in 2003. Following that, the Great Sandy Marine Park southern section will be declared and it will benefit from participation in the Wide Bay regional coastal management plan process.

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority has formally commenced a review of all four zoned sections of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park and the initial zoning of 28 new sections in coastal areas that had previously been excluded. The EPA has announced a concurrent review of marine parks in adjacent Queensland waters.

This close cooperation between the Commonwealth and Queensland will result in complementary planning and management for the entire Great Barrier Reef world heritage area,

including substantial estuarine and coastal areas. There will be a continuous marine park from Baffle Creek to the tip of Cape York. The projected completion date for this undertaking is 2004.

After the completion of the Great Barrier Reef project, the planning focus will move to the south-east. The Moreton Bay Marine Park will be reviewed and consideration will be given to the areas from Double Island Point to Caloundra. Once the Great Sandy Marine Park is declared, work will commence on the establishment of a marine park in the Gulf of Carpentaria. This vast system is worthy of protection. The cooperation of the Northern Territory and the Commonwealth will be needed to effect a comprehensive approach.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 23 of the MPS reference is made to the expenditure of an estimated \$2.66 million on coastal acquisitions. Can you report on where those acquisitions took place and what benefit will be gained by the community?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. There were a number of acquisitions under that program. There are 140 hectares in the Pumicestone Passage, and I thank the honourable member for Kawana and the honourable member for Pumicestone for drawing the attention of my officers to the values of those hectares. There are four hectares of Queen's Beach in Bowen, there was an addition of 460 to the Edmund Kennedy National Park in Cardwell, 16.5 off Magnetic Island adjacent to a nature refuge—and that is another example of nature refuges working in conjunction with government owned land in order to provide a more extensive habitat for the flora and fauna—and there is 55 hectares in the Maroochy area. These acquisitions have led to a significant improvement in our capacity to protect sensitive areas of our coastline. The program is designed to contribute to the outcome, so that we will have a coastline there that will be as unique and as varied and as biodiverse and as beautiful to bequeath to our children and for them to bequeath to theirs as we inherited from our parents.

**Mr POOLE:** This is rehashing something again, I suppose. On page 6 of the MPS, reference is made to the Fraser Island dingo management strategy. As it is now more than a year since the fatal dingo attack on Fraser Island, can you inform the committee on the progress of implementing the dingo management plan?

**Mr WELLS:** As I indicated, the dingo risk assessment has been implemented to the management strategy. The documents that I have tabled in response to our parliamentary colleagues' questions indicate the nature of the management strategy. That is all under way. We have 15 camp ground rangers to ensure that people are dingo aware, four dingo management specialist rangers, as well as conservatives based on the mainland. All of these initiatives, plus the zero tolerance, plus the use of ratshot and slingshot to frighten them off, are all new and purposive actions which are there to address a problem.

I would just like to make it very clear that the problem is that people—sometimes from overseas, sometimes local—are feeding the things and it does not matter how often you tell some of them, they are going to go on doing it. Those people are condemning somebody else to being injured by a familiarised dingo and they are condemning the dingo itself to being shot. We have zero tolerance of this behaviour in human beings. Anybody who does it is going to be fined or kicked off the island. We have zero tolerance of it in the animals. Any dingo that shows aggression towards human beings will be shot. People just need to learn that the consequences of what they are doing are completely unacceptable.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** On page 17 of the MPS reference is made to a planned, proactive compliance inspection program in south-east Queensland. Can you inform the committee which areas are being targeted and what are the anticipated benefits to water quality?

**Mr WELLS:** What this does is help people to avoid doing those things which are going to lead them into trouble. It is all very well to be reactive; but if you can be proactive, it is even better. The program is going to target particular industries—the extraction industry, for example—to establish best practice in that industry and work with individuals in that industry in order to get a better outcome.

I will ask Mark Williamson if he will come forward and speak to us a little bit more about the roll-out of this program. I would emphasise, as he is coming forward, that my department is not just about reacting to environmental wrongs; we are also about educating people to try and get a better consciousness about how, realistically, we can improve our environment in the future.

**Mr WILLIAMSON:** In the year 2001-02, in addition to normal routine inspections and responding to complaints and incidents, in our south-eastern area of Queensland we undertook 1,100 proactive catchment inspections together with local government. The intention is to build on that work.

Our new statewide proactive compliance program will have three main dimensions to it. One will be targeted inspections of various environmentally relevant activities commensurate with the risks. The second element will be catchment inspections where, as the minister mentioned before, we are focusing proactively on a system. The third area will be selecting certain industries and doing sector audits.

The intention is, on both the catchment inspections and sector audits, to publish reports which will provide assistance generally in educating industries. With the catchment programs, two of the catchments which work has already commenced on are the Oxley Creek catchment, in conjunction with the Brisbane City Council, and the Bremer River catchment as well. Two further catchments identified which will commence shortly will be the Pumicestone and Pine River catchments. In the Oxley, Pumicestone and Pine catchments the emphasis will be on, as the minister mentioned, extractive industries and removing sediment loads from those catchments. On Oxley Creek there are some very large industries. Seven have been inspected so far and four of the seven will be required by the EPA to make significant improvements in relation to sediment discharge. So these programs are under way.

Also in our southern region, our south-east area, through streamlining efficiencies in licensing, we have been able to move 15 full-time equivalent staff out of licensing activities and into the proactive compliance program.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 1 of the MPS you say that the EPA continues to ensure the environment is clean and healthy through setting, monitoring and enforcing standards by innovative methods to achieve compliance. Can you report to the committee the number and scale of successful prosecutions pursued by the EPA, and has the EPA pollution hotline been a success?

**Mr WELLS:** Yes. As I indicated to the committee before, there have been 32 prosecutions. All of them resulted in convictions, there have been two that have resulted in prison sentences and, as I said before, \$160,000 in fines has been yielded as a result of it.

With respect to the question relating to the EPA hotline, that is territory that we have not covered before. The EPA hotline has been extremely successful. I think I will invite Mark to speak to that one as well.

**Mr WILLIAMSON:** The EPA's pollution hotline was launched in May 2000. The number is 1300 130 EPA. EPA is 372 on your touch phone. That is for reporting of all environmental incidents. The hotline means the public have one convenient number for contacting the EPA about any complaint and pollution incidents such as oil spills, chemical leaks, the dumping of waste or fish kills. The hotline receives approximately 1,000 calls each month. It has gradually built up over the past couple of years, which suggests it has been very successful. About one-third of these calls are made outside normal business hours and the usage has progressively built up.

Matters that require urgent attention are immediately escalated to an EPA environmental officer and we have those people on call 24-hours a day right across the state. The hotline has enhanced the EPA's ability to respond quickly to environmental incidents. Time can be very critical in preventing harm. Our first emphasis is always to make sure that the harm is cleaned up and, secondly, to investigate whether there are any matters that could be pursued by further action. So, the sooner we can be advised, the better, and obviously a single number helps to do that.

The hotline has also been well received by other government agencies and local governments. It is an automatic escalation if any local government officer or other state government officer contacts the hotline. The matter is automatically escalated without further checks.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 3, where I asked for a list of where algae outbreaks have occurred in Queensland, and how many times they have occurred on each site over the past five years. That information was not provided and I would be grateful if that could be provided now.

**Mr WELLS:** I refer to my answer to an earlier question on lymbya today.

**Mr LESTER:** I refer to question on notice No. 3, part D, which mentions that pfiesteria algae is widespread in estuaries and marine environments in Australia. In estimates last year, when queried about the algae outbreak, you actually stated, 'I'm not sure how much we did. I think it went away because we went out there.' You only mentioned monitoring about half a dozen rivers

in your earlier statement. Are there any plans to extend this and have you any plans to extend this technique, or is the technique improving?

**Mr WELLS:** Since the results of the tests were negative, we do not see any point in continuing it. I think the status of pfiesteria is that it is something which is endemic in the environment. We are not going to get rid of it. It is like the germs that are in your mouth; you are not going to get rid of them but they are not going to be a problem unless there is a major outbreak of them. The environmental conditions which generate those major outbreaks which appear in America are not duplicated here. So we have done the tests, the tests have proved negative and there is no obvious reason for continuing them.

Mr Chairman, by your leave, we now have the answers to the questions relating to figures, which were essentially requests for repackaging of the figures that had previously been given. My departmental officer, Olwyn Crimp, is available to provide the committee with that repackaging, if we have leave?

**The CHAIR:** I think the committee is agreed.

**Mr LESTER:** Yes.

**Ms CRIMP:** One of the questions that you asked, honourable Mr Lester, was with reference to water quality in Moreton Bay, what moneys had been allocated by the state government for the purpose of water monitoring, research and clean-up. This program was conducted through the Moreton Bay partnership, which was previously known as the South-East Queensland Regional Water Quality Management Strategy. It was done as a partnership between the Commonwealth, the state and local governments and was funded to the tune of one-third for each party: one-third for the Commonwealth, one-third for the state and one-third for local government.

It was not done in a yearly program; it was done as a program through stages. In stage 2, which was 1997-98, there was \$5 million in total. The state contribution would be one-third of that. From July 1998 to June 2001, stage three of that program, it was \$10 million. So the total for that period was \$15 million and that equated to \$5 million from the state, \$5 million from local government and \$5 million from the Commonwealth.

In relation to the question of how much was spent on monitoring—and this relates to that program of the South-East Queensland Regional Water Quality Management Strategy—there was \$700,000 spent per year by the EPA on that program of water quality monitoring. In relation to the programs relating to clean-up, that has not been a large focus of the program. It has largely focused, in the initial stages, on obtaining good research data and information on which to make management decisions.

There has been a program, though, that has been contracted as a joint program between state, local government and industry to do debris clean-ups. There has been \$50,000 from the state government in relation to that program over the last few years. It is included again for this financial year. That program really is contracted out to a community group that goes around with boats and cleans up all the litter in the rivers. It has resulted in very large amounts of litter being picked up. The funding for that program that I just stated was reserved for the waterways in particular and did not include the lyngbya funding, which is separate to that.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Environment has expired. I thank you, Minister, and your advisers for your attendance. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard Internet Quick Access web site within two hours from now. The committee will adjourn for afternoon tea and the hearing will resume at 4.00 p.m. to examine the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Planning.

**Mr WELLS:** May I thank honourable members, officers, Hansard and other staff for their contributions to today.

Sitting suspended from 3.49 p.m. to 4.01 p.m.

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

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

Dr T. Campbell, Director-General

Ms L. O'Neill, Manager, Finance and Administration Unit, Corporate and Executive Services

Mr S. Wypych, General Manager, Planning Services

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**Mr CHAIRMAN:** I declare the hearing open. The next portfolio to be examined relates to the Minister for Local Government and Planning. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and for answers is three minutes. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents. The sessional orders require that at least half the time for questions at today's hearing be allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns in asking questions in blocks lasting approximately 20 minutes. In relation to any media coverage of this afternoon's hearings, the committee has resolved that video coverage be allowed only during the opening statements. I should point out that today's proceedings are similar to the 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 the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. The time allotted to the portfolio of Local Government and Planning is three hours and 15 minutes, with a 15-minute break close to 5.30 p.m. I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Local Government and Planning open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Would the minister like to make a brief introductory statement or proceed directly into the questioning?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will make a statement. The last financial year was another very busy period in my portfolio, with notable achievements being an improvement in the level and quality of local government infrastructure and services through grant and subsidy programs of more than \$445 million during 2001-02. Subsidy offers made to councils for new projects included: \$74.5 million from the Local Governing Bodies Capital Works Subsidy Scheme as 40 and 50 per cent subsidies for water and sewerage infrastructure and for a range of other infrastructure; \$23 million under the natural disaster relief arrangements program to restore damaged local government assets; \$2 million under the security improvement program to improve security in public places; and \$2 million under the showground subsidy scheme to improve showground facilities in 88 different communities. Other notable achievements in 2001-02 were key legislation to improve fire safety standards in existing budget accommodation buildings; the continuation of the IPA consequential legislative amendments program in order to integrate a range of development approvals within the IDAS; completion of a review on the procedural and administrative components of IPA and IDAS; preparation of legislation and of course the passing of the Integrated Planning and Other Legislation Amendment Act in December 2001; the promotion of best practice and performance in the operation of the IPA and IDAS through statewide training sessions and the development of a comprehensive range of advisory educative and information materials; the release of draft legislative proposals for comment as part of the reviews of electoral procedures in the Local Government Act; and the introduction of a state legislative framework for the regulation of restricted dogs.

In 2002-03 the department will have a budget of \$190 million, including \$165 million for local government grants and subsidies. This leaves a departmental operating budget of \$25 million. In addition, the department will administer a further \$272 million pertaining to grants and subsidies. In terms of grants, the department will continue its commitment to the provision of funding to local governments for infrastructure and services. While the MPS indicates a decline of \$21.3 million in the quantum of local government grants and subsidies, this is misleading. The reduction principally reflects a projected drop in the number of claims under the natural disaster relief arrangements. Simply put, there were fewer natural disasters than in previous years, so expected claims for relief have reduced. Once we exclude the NDRA figures and the carryover

commitments from 2000-01, other grant payments are actually expected to increase by \$31 million in 2002-03. That is more money for local government infrastructure, including water and sewerage works. It should be noted, however, that if Queensland unfortunately suffers new natural disasters which drive up the number of claims in 2002-03, Treasury will provide the department with additional funds to meet that extra expenditure.

It should also be noted that the local government bodies capital works subsidy scheme is largely a demand-driven subsidy scheme, meaning of course that the more claims lodged by local governments the more funds the department pays out. The 2002-03 budget for this subsidy scheme is based on estimated claims for the year. If local governments expedite their projects, further funds will be provided by Treasury to meet those extra expenditures.

This budget will also include additional funding for a number of items, including: \$2.6 million over three years to complete the full implementation of IPA, involving completing a consequential legislative amendments program; providing advice to local governments on the preparation of their new planning schemes and coordinating all state agencies' input into these schemes; and providing comprehensive training throughout the state on the operational review program. Overall, this refined system will provide more efficient and timely assessment of development applications particularly in comparison with other states. In addition to the regional planning funds provided for north Queensland, western and central Queensland and south-east Queensland, a further \$1.3 million is provided over three years for the SEQ 2021 program, \$600,000 is provided over two years to facilitate the completion and implementation of a master plan for the area immediately west of the Brisbane central business district, known as City West Task Force, and the budget also provides \$500,000 over the next 12 months to advise owners of budget accommodation on the need to upgrade their buildings.

Once again, we have another busy year ahead. I am happy to participate in today's proceedings and I will be including the director-general, Dr Campbell, and his staff in questions from time to time during the hearing. My department has a staff of 244 and we work as a team to deliver an efficient, effective and accountable local government system for everyone who is privileged to live in Queensland.

**The CHAIR:** The first round of questions will be from the non-government members.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to your lack of an answer to question on notice No. 6, which related to departmental activities such as reviews, investigations, realignments, restructures, steering committees, working committees, interdepartmental working groups and pilot programs. Your colleagues the Minister for Police, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines, the Minister for Emergency Services, and the Minister for Employment and Training have all responded to this question in detail. Will you undertake to provide this information to the committee on notice and have that done at the earliest available opportunity?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The sessional orders adopted by the Legislative Assembly for the estimates committee process, specifically sessional order No. 26(5) in relation to questions on notice prior to hearing, stipulate that each question is not to contain subparts or to in effect ask more than one question.

**Mr HOBBS:** It did not worry the other ministers; they were happy to do it. This relates to dot point 5 on page 7 of the MPS, dot point 3 on page 8 of the MPS, and dot points 3 and 4 on pages 16 and 17. It is all through the MPS. The other ministers did not find it a problem. I am asking if you could possibly ask your department to provide this information in due course. I am happy to put it on notice.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You have got the choice of asking me those questions during this hearing. As you say, it refers to items in the MPS. Otherwise, if you would like to put it on notice, we will answer it as soon as possible. But you would understand yourself, having been a minister, that an enormous amount of work is involved in answering that question. That is why it was not answered in this time frame.

**Mr HOBBS:** I will put it on notice. Minister, you stated in the parliament that you wrote to all of the mayors in February this year to clarify the fire safety legislation. You stated, 'I do not believe I have received one complaint from a council since then.' I wish to advise that I am aware of at least one district local government association which wrote to you on 11 March with its complaint about the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2001. Another one, the Kilkivan Shire Council, wrote to you on 20 March advising you of its concerns. Yet you stated in the parliament on 11 April that no council has raised the issue. Have you misled parliament on the issue or do you not read your correspondence from the councils?

**The CHAIR:** Is that regarding this estimates committee or parliamentary business?

**Mr HOBBS:** No, it is in relation to the fire services legislation and it is in the MPS in paragraph 6 on page 3.

**The CHAIR:** But your question is regarding what was said in parliament by the minister. You are asking whether she has misled the House. I cannot see how that is related to what is in an MPS statement.

**Mr HOBBS:** The MPS statement talks about the fact that the minister has introduced this legislation and she has stated that no local government contacted her about that. I am asking the minister now: do you believe that other councils have contacted you and objected to the fire service legislation?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Mr Chairman, if you wish, I will answer that question.

**The CHAIR:** Go ahead.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I would like to have a look at *Hansard* on that. I believe that I did not say that no councils have contacted me. I think I said that no councils have put forward complaints about that legislation.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, that was not what you said. If you have a look at the *Hansard*, it is quite clear that you said no-one has contacted you.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** No, I said that no council had put in complaints about it.

**Mr HOBBS:** They have. Minister, you stated in parliament in relation to the fire safety legislation that the only buildings that will need council approval are 400 buildings across Queensland that need building approvals, and that that is the job of local government. There is great concern from councils that your reading of the definition is not accurate. For instance, you advised some shires, including Kilkivan, that there are no applicable buildings in the shire. However, on its reading of the definition of 'shire', it has identified five premises in the shire that come under that legislation. Councils have written to you on this matter. Have you asked your department to conduct a new estimate of the number of buildings captured by the legislation and, if not, why not, as there appear to be some clear discrepancies between you and the councils?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You have asked me about five or six different questions and you have misquoted me on a number of occasions. I would never have told Kilkivan or any other council that it did not have any buildings in its area. That is not something I would have said. I would have asked them whether they had any buildings in their area that would comply. I think we have made that very clear. I certainly did not say there were 400. I said that there were approximately 1,400 buildings in Queensland that would be affected by this legislation. I also added to most people that there would be approximately 1,000 of those that will only need smoke alarms, emergency lighting and an evacuation management plan within 12 months; that the other approximately 400 buildings would need some sort of structural change, that is, extra stairways, doorways or something that would need a building approval. Building approvals must go through the council.

**Mr HOBBS:** A document from the Kilkivan Shire Council says that the minister states there is no applicable building in the Kilkivan shire and only 22 in the Wide Bay area, and that on its reading of the definition there are possibly five premises in the Kilkivan shire.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Is that a letter from Kilkivan?

**Mr HOBBS:** This is a fax from the Kilkivan shire.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will have to differ on our opinion, because I would not have told any council that it did not have any buildings in its area. It might have misconstrued what I said. I certainly would never have told any council that it did not have them. Of the five buildings it says it has, does it know how many will need structural change?

**Mr HOBBS:** I am not sure. Would you be prepared to have the department look again at what impact it has on local government? Will you do an assessment of what impact it really has?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I believe that has all been done, that is, the impacts on local government. It is standard local government practice when looking at building approvals to look at planning applications. They will continue to do that. When you look at the number of building approvals put through in one year in councils right across Queensland and the value of the work involved here, you see that it is a very small percentage increase in their workload. I think it is really for the councils to proceed now. We have seminars starting right across Queensland. I think there are 27 different seminars. I am launching the first one tomorrow in Bundaberg, and that is

for owners and councils to have a look at the requirements and talk it over with the department. That is our way of communicating with them and bringing them up to date with what is and is not necessary, what they have to worry about and put in place. Those will be starting tomorrow and will be held, I believe off the top of my head, in 27 different areas, mostly regional cities, or else areas such as Airlie Beach that have a number of backpacker hostels.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to public liability and fire safety. You will recall that when we debated the legislation dealing with fire safety for budget accommodation buildings you stated that a number of views have been expressed that the legislation would create a regulatory and financial burden on local governments and that that is simply not the case. You further asked why council insurance premiums would not go down when a building is safer and the risk is lower. You will further recall that the Local Government Association provided documentation to say that public liability would increase due to three factors—September 11, the decision on non-feasance on road control by local government, and your fire safety legislation on budget accommodation. As local government public liability has increased by an average of 80 per cent—very close to what was predicted by the Local Government Association—do you still think your legislation had no impact on local government public liability premiums?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am happy to answer that. In developing this legislation the government sought to devise a regulatory system that would ensure that budget accommodation buildings were upgraded yet would not impose unnecessary compliance costs on owners, councils or the fire service. Therefore, the legislation is drafted in order to ensure that primary responsibility for compliance with the prescribed standards is on the owner—not on the council, on the owner. The vast majority of buildings will be able to comply with that legislation, as I said earlier, once smoke alarms and emergency lighting are installed by the owners without any further licensing or approvals by the local council or the fire service. Where building alterations are necessary to make those buildings safe such as an additional fire escape, the owner is required to obtain a building permit from the council. In addition, if owners are unsure as to whether their building complies with the standard, the legislation provides a mechanism by which they can seek formal advice from the council.

My department estimates that there are about 400 of those buildings mainly in major urban centres which will require further upgrading if they are to be made safe and building approval is required. Council building application fees will be able to cover any costs associated with providing these services, and it is a relatively small number of buildings. With the amount of building approvals that councils put through in any one year, I cannot see how this small increase in building approvals would warrant any rise in their insurance fees. Claims that the legislation will increase public liability and professional indemnity protection costs for councils do not take into account that the existing roles and responsibilities of local government cover that now.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I note that local governments are paying an additional \$6 million in public liability up to \$8 million to a total of \$14 million now. I note that you have put in half a million dollars over the next 12 months to identify cost-effective ways of improving safety of other high-risk buildings. Do you intend to load councils with further responsibilities when you have already personally loaded them with \$2 million extra a year of the \$6 million increase that will escalate with inflation due to your fire safety legislation? That will cost local government at least \$20 million extra in the next 10 years. It is there in black and white. If you want to look at the documentation you can. Insurance premiums have gone up and quite clearly the insurance company has said that the risk profile for local government has increased due to—

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Because of this legislation?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, due to your legislation. It is in black and white. The company has said that.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** How much has it gone up because of the—

**Mr HOBBS:** \$6 million.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** How much has it gone up because of the increase in—

**Mr HOBBS:** About \$2 million.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** No. You are saying \$2 million a year for this.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We are estimating that this work is only going to be costed at about \$8 million—that is, the whole of the work—and some of that work is going to take up to three years.

**Mr HOBBS:** The trouble is that the insurance company does not believe you.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Which insurance company?

**Mr HOBBS:** The insurance company is Jardine Lloyd Thompson. That is the insurance company that does all local government in Queensland. It is the insurers from which the Local Government Association bulk-buy. It has the best buying power you could possibly have and the premium has gone up. You have cost local government \$20 million over the next 10 years.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is a false statement.

**The CHAIR:** I remind the member for Warrego that under sessional order 25 the member may ask a question, not make a speech. Will you respond please, Minister.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Thank you, Mr Chairman. That is a false statement. How could it possibly go up \$20 million? You have got to look at insurance all over. Insurance everywhere has gone up—everywhere. You cannot possibly blame a—did you tell me \$20 million?

**Mr HOBBS:** Over 10 years, yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That would be \$40 million over 20 years, would it?

**Mr HOBBS:** That is right. Very quick.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You cannot possibly convince me that that is a legitimate claim.

**Mr HOBBS:** You had better talk to the insurance company. Minister, do you think it is fair and reasonable that a government should transfer the public liability responsibility that was once on the Queensland government fire services onto local government without adequate compensation or funding? Is that really fair?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think that we have done that at all. The only responsibility the councils have got here are with building applications. That is their role. They have a responsibility under the act to handle building applications. That is what they are doing in this case.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, thanks for that. I refer now to pool fencing. The first dot point on page 7 of the MPS refers to your department's responsibility for developing legislation to address emerging issues and evaluating existing legislation to provide a framework appropriate for contemporary local government. At the conclusion of an inquest in May into the tragic drowning of a two-year-old child at Thornlands last year the coroner, Christine Clements, recommended that the Queensland parliament pass laws requiring all swimming pools irrespective of the date of construction of the pool or house to comply with current legislative requirements for isolation fencing. At the time you were reported as saying that child safety was paramount and that you would examine the coroner's recommendations to determine if amendments to the legislation were required. Will you be acting on the coroner's recommendations? If so, when?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Following the drowning of that two-year-old child in a backyard pool the coroner has recommended that parliament pass laws requiring all swimming pools, irrespective of the date of construction—because that did change, as you would be aware—to be surrounded by isolation fences as well as the fences that are already there. When swimming pool fencing legislation was introduced in 1991 existing pools were also required to be fenced at that time. The legislation recognised that it would not always be practicable to fence between the house and the pool in some existing situations, but it required in those situations that house doors were to close automatically. The intent of that legislation is to inhibit a young child's access to the pool and the integrity of the fencing depends upon the owner's maintenance, particularly in relation to self-closing gates and whether the user places objects close to the fence to make it climbable. So there are a lot of reasons why children can get into swimming pools. There are a lot of reasons why an isolation fence might be a good idea. It might be an excellent idea, but then what are you going to put inside that isolation fence if somebody leaves the gate open or if somebody puts something up against the fence? You have to look at these things logically.

After the fencing legislation was introduced originally in 1991, drownings decreased dramatically. This was attributable to both the new fencing laws and also the very high level of public awareness due to intense media coverage at that time. My department is currently reviewing pool fencing. I will take any practical steps that are considered necessary to protect young children from drowning or injuries in backyard swimming pools. However, no legislation is going to be able to prevent all toddler drownings. It is not possible to do that unfortunately. I think that parents and guardians will always need to be watching closely when children are anywhere

near water, whether it be backyard pools or council operated pools or at the beach. You cannot have legislation that will overcome every possibility.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 8 dot point three in relation to electoral procedures. I note that you are progressing legislation to implement changes to electoral procedures in the Local Government Act 1993. I also remind you that you brought into parliament last year legislation which rorted the electoral system by restricting councillors from running for state and federal elections until they had first resigned. Last year in estimates I asked you if your proposed legislation was consistent with the requirements of the Commonwealth Electoral Act and section 327 of the EARC report on political liberty. You said—

... if it—

that is this legislation—

were not consistent we would have heard something about it by now. Of course it is consistent.

The Supreme Court overwhelmingly found it inconsistent and rejected your argument and disallowed federal candidates from your legislation. Why don't you do the right thing and support local government, repeal the discriminatory legislation and give all councillors the right to run for state parliament without first resigning their position?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think this has anything to do with this budget. However, I will say that the ruling of the court at that stage said, from memory, that it was inconsistent with Commonwealth law. So the only part of that legislation that was ruled out was the part that applied to councillors running for Commonwealth government.

**Mr HOBBS:** You said it was right, though. Remember when I asked you, you said, 'Oh no, it is right. It definitely is right.'

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, and at that stage our legal advice was that it was right. We have been proven wrong with that, but only in respect of councillors standing for Commonwealth elections. Of course, that is null and void now, and that will be withdrawn from the legislation at the first opportune moment. But the section of that act that referred to councillors standing for state elections stands.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Pumicestone.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** In the 2002-03 budget highlights it is noted that your department will undertake an education program for budget accommodation owners and councils with regard to the fire safety legislation. I understand that an amount of \$500,000 has been allocated for this purpose and to identify ways to improve the safety of other high-risk buildings. Could you please provide details to the committee of the training and education planned and also explain what will be done to improve the safety of other high-risk buildings?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I have answered a lot of this already, but it is a very important piece of legislation, so I am very happy to answer it again. The horrific Childers backpacker hostel fire that claimed the lives of 15 young people was a tragedy. In April this year tough new fire legislation for the Queensland budget accommodation sector was passed by state parliament. This legislation is about ensuring that people who use budget accommodation, whether they are backpackers, people on low incomes or the disabled, are able to evacuate these buildings safely in the event of a fire.

A fire safety standard for budget accommodation buildings was developed in consultation with building owners and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and came into effect with the new legislation on 1 July. The key objective of the legislation is to ensure the safe evacuation of building occupants in the event of a fire and aims to achieve that with early warning of smoke from a fire, emergency lighting for escape, preventing overcrowding in bedrooms, establishing maximum emergency escape distances and minimum numbers of exits from buildings. About 1,400 budget accommodation buildings would be affected by the legislation and, as I said earlier, about 1,000 would only require smoke alarms, emergency lighting and an evacuation safety management plan within 12 months. The standard also includes provisions that address the needs of people with disabilities in evacuating a building. Queensland is the first state or territory in Australia to include such provisions.

The responsibility for complying with the standard rests, as I said earlier, with the building owner. However, the state government is mindful to ensure that the cost of making these buildings safe is affordable and does not place an unreasonable regulatory burden on councils. I believe that this has been achieved. The new standard is crucial in making sure that a tragedy like

the Childers fire does not happen again, and the state government has committed substantial resources to ensure that building owners and councils have access to the necessary support and advice on how to comply. My department will be carrying out an extensive program of training and education for building owners and local government officers to assist in the initial assessment of those buildings. As I said earlier, I will be launching the first one in Bundaberg tomorrow.

The training will take the form of full-day sessions and a half-day workshop, and 16 guidelines will be provided to building owners and local governments with detailed information on such matters as how to comply with the fire safety standard, the development application process and the inspection and maintenance regimes that are necessary to maintain the levels of fire services. In this budget the state government has allocated an additional \$500,000 to the area of fire safety management. The multiagency task force established following the Childers backpacker hostel fire identified other buildings that also are at risk and will also be carrying out audits to see what those buildings are and how we can possibly overcome problems there, as well.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** I certainly felt that it was important to reiterate some of those points, and I congratulate you and your department on the work that has gone into that. In the 2002-03 budget highlights I note that a further \$2.6 million will be provided to continue the Integrated Planning Act to reform implementation and ask: what will be the benefits of this additional funding?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Specifically, the benefits of the funding will include an ability to deliver, firstly, on the reviews of up to 114 IPA planning schemes currently in preparation, coordination of up to 250 potential whole-of-government reviews by the department's regional divisions and ongoing reviews of scheme amendments to new schemes. Also, local governments will benefit from technical advice, training, guidelines and scheme models as they prepare their new schemes. State agencies, particularly in regional offices, will benefit from assistance provided to ensure that the matters of state government interest are appropriately addressed. Secondly, IDAS implementation and training will benefit local governments, state agencies and the development sector, as approximately 40 formal training workshops are planned focusing particularly on the Integrated Planning and Other Legislation Amendment Act and the consequential amendments proposed for 2002-03. Additionally, the departmental staff will continue attendance at informal client meetings and seminars focusing on IPA matters.

The formal workshops proposed include a number of different workshops—approximately 40 training workshops around Queensland on the IPOLA act, including four five-day intensive training workshops in major centres and approximately 30 to 35 two-day workshops in key locations across Queensland. This will include Cairns, Townsville, Mackay, Rockhampton, Longreach, Wide Bay, Toowoomba—all those major regional centres. In addition, training in smaller central and western Queensland locations will be provided as part of the department's regular visits to central and western Queensland. The workshops will be aimed at local governments and state agencies.

A series of briefings and seminars will also be held for the wider development industry. Training workshops on the integration of new approvals into IPA include the Coastal Protection and Management Act, the Fisheries Act and the Heritage Act. They all have to be incorporated. So there are training workshops on the new State Purchasing Policy for development in the vicinity of certain airports and aviation facilities. So the training is ongoing. It is very intensive and, of course, it is expensive.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, I take this opportunity to congratulate you and your department on what could only be incredibly difficult and onerous legislation to be getting through. I also appreciate the work that you are doing. Page 3 of the MPS under the heading 'Review by the Queensland Local Government Grants Commission' indicates that a report on the review of the methodology used by the Queensland Grants Commission to calculate funding to councils will not be available until January 2003. Could you please advise the committee what stage the review is currently at?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The commission released information papers and very broad terms of reference in February of this year. The terms of reference did not preclude any party raising any issues that they wished with the commission. Some 60 written submissions were received by the closing date of 31 March, four regional seminars were held in February and March, and 19 individual councils have been visited by the commission. The commission also made presentations to the Aboriginal Co-ordinating Council and the Island Co-ordinating Council. The commission was planning to release a draft report in September 2002, but following Minister Tuckey's advice rejecting limits on changes in this 2002-03 grant, the Queensland Grants

Commission has further considered the issue of the 2002-03 grant. The commission resolved on 6 June to recommend that all councils receive an increased grant in 2002-03 as the commission does not want to see the existing methodology implemented any further. This is a stronger line than originally recommended by the commission, and there has been ongoing discussion on that. So at the moment the discussions are still continuing, I believe, between our Queensland commission and the Commonwealth.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, the Department of Local Government and Planning manages grant and subsidy programs totalling \$445 million. That assists local governing bodies to provide a wide range of infrastructure and services to build Queensland's regions and support the development of local communities. Would you please explain to the committee what this \$445 million represents?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am very happy to answer that question. That is a lot of money going to our local councils. The \$445 million is a budget appropriation available to make grant and subsidy payments to local governments. The budget appropriation is revised during the year according to expected payments to local governments. The appropriation of \$445 million was determined in April 2002 and is the amount the department expected to pay to local governments by 30 June this year.

The \$445 million includes the Commonwealth financial assistance grant of \$258.4 million but excludes the payments from the national competition policy financial incentive package. NCP payments are excluded because they are largely distributed on the recommendation of the Queensland Competition Authority. The Queensland Treasury has provided additional funds if the revised estimate for this year does not prove adequate.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, on page 15 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, under the heading 'Recent Achievements', the first dot point indicates that the department has continued to progress the IPA consequential amendment program to integrate a range of development approvals within IDAS. What is this program and what have been some of the milestones during the year?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I understand that when the coalition government gave approval for the Integrated Planning Act to be introduced into the parliament in 1997 it also approved a substantial program of consequential amendments to other state legislation to incorporate the assessment of a range of development into the integrated development assessment system. The original objective was to integrate about 60 separate approvals under the old system into the IPA IDAS framework. Many of these have already been integrated, including a number of approvals for aspects of building work. As a consequence of policy changes since the commencement of the IPA some of these approvals have fallen away and other new approvals—for example, for the removal of native vegetation—have been integrated into IDAS.

Some of the approvals that have already been integrated are from the Local Government Planning and Environment Act, which has been repealed; the Building Act; the Workplace Health and Safety Act; the Environmental Protection Act, to do with the approval and licensing of environmentally relevant activities, development on contaminated land and so on; the Stock Act 1915 regarding cattle feedlots; the state development and public works organisation; and the Transport Infrastructure Act. All of those acts have been already integrated into IDAS. That will continue for some time with consequential legislative amendments. The final date for councils to comply with IPA is March 2003, but the consequential amendments will continue long after that as everyone settles in.

**Mr POOLE:** On page 16 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements under the heading 'Future Developments', the second dot point indicates that the government will be completing the IPA operational review. Was this review not completed with the passing of legislation last December?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The operational review created an opportunity to obtain stakeholders' views on how the IPA and IDAS were functioning in actual practice and to finetune its operation in response to the experience gained in the first years after the commencement of the act. The focus of the review was on identifying procedural and administrative improvements to both schemes and on where operational efficiencies could be obtained. There was no intention at that time to make any major changes to the underlying principles of the IPA.

Submissions to the review were called. These were analysed and collated into a report and recommendations. Some 2,000 individual proposals were put forward for consideration. Key stakeholders were involved in discussion on those recommendations. Legislation was prepared based on these discussions. The Integrated Planning and Other Legislation Amendment Act was

passed in December 2001. A small number of provisions commenced on assent; however, the bulk of the act is as yet uncommenced.

At the time of introduction it was agreed that a further amendment bill to deal with the complex transitional matters involved, the necessary regulations, guidelines and other explanatory material and training programs to support the act would need to be prepared before it could commence. Progress in these matters includes preparation of drafting instructions, preparation of draft regulations to support the EIS process in the IPOLA Act, preparation of drafting instructions for regulations to support compliance assessment, and refinement of the draft statutory guidelines for material change of use and designations. Those things will all be coming together in a second IPOLA bill towards the end of the year.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, given that regional planning is a priority of the Beattie government, what benefits do such programs provide and what is the current progress of regional planning frameworks in far-north and north Queensland?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Regional planning is a priority of this government. It is certainly doing a wonderful job in identifying the needs of the different regions. Regional plans have become a significant mechanism for integrating and coordinating state and local government as well as community interests across a wide range of environmental, economic and social issues. In particular, regional plans provide a stable and consistent framework for progressing whole-of-government interest checks into the development of local government planning schemes within a regional context. Regional plans provide a mechanism for establishing agreed infrastructure and development priorities at a regional level. This is why they are so very important. Regional plans also provide improved consistency in planning decisions at state and local government level. This in turn provides a more stable environment for business and industry decision making and improved community understanding and expectations for future development directions.

The implementation activity for the far-north Queensland regional plan in 2002 focused on integration of the regional plan outcomes with the state whole-of-government review, a negotiated agreement on the 15 priority implementation projects and progression of regional planning outcomes through state and local government work programs. Progress has been made in the environment, economic development, urban development, transport, water and waste management elements of the regional plan.

Key projects completed or substantially undertaken during 2001-02 included the Wet Tropics nature based recreation strategy, the regional economic sustainability study, the Kuranda Range integrated transport study, the Cairns southern corridor integrated land use and transport study, the Captain Cook Highway transport study, the Edmonton Centre study, the Myola feasibility study, the Cairns subregional waste management project, the Barron River draft water resource management plan and the Cairns and Tablelands water infrastructure study. You can see that a lot of work is going into regional planning. Substantial funding is coming from the government. It is very important for the future direction of these regions.

**The CHAIR:** The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Warrego.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer again to electoral procedures. I note the speech of the former Minister for Local Government to parliament on the Local Government and Other Legislation Amendment Bill—a similar bill to the one that you took to parliament last year. In that speech he stated—

It would stop councillors being elected with the intention of then seeking higher office prior to completing their full term of office.

At the time when you sought higher office, your commitment to the people and completing your full term of office as mayor did not seem to be of any concern as you had served only 14 months—just one-third—of the term, March 1997 to 21 May 1998. Would you not agree that there may be other councillors who wish to do what you have done, but you have denied them that choice by legislation?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** No, and I thank you for the question. If anybody else wants to do the same thing as I did, they are welcome to do that, because I actually resigned before I stood for state parliament. I resigned from the office of mayor of Bundaberg.

**Mr HOBBS:** You did not complete your term, did you?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** No, I did not complete my term and I would love to tell you why. It was my third term and, as you would probably know, Bundaberg and the district of

Bundaberg—the whole region—is desperately in need of water. They have been desperately in need of water for a long, long time—25 years they have been chasing that dam up there. From where I was sitting in the mayor's chair, there was absolutely nothing happening. It was not coming. I could see businesses closing, I saw young students leaving school with no jobs—there are no jobs up there—and Bundaberg is going nowhere until we get water.

**Mr HOBBS:** No future mayor can do it, can they.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I felt that, as local major, you could not do that.

**Mr HOBBS:** You stopped them.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You could not achieve that from local government. So I made the decision—and it was not a very easy decision, either—but I made the decision that I would do what I could to get that dam for Bundaberg. I resigned from my position and I took my chances at the state election. Anybody else who would like to do that is welcome to do it. I took my chances, got into state parliament, and happily I can say that in my first term I had a commitment for that dam. I am sure that the member for Callide is just as excited about it as I am. Thank you.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. That was very good. In fact, the dam should have been built in the first term.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The dam should have been built 25 years ago. Do not push me on that one.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to the business management assistance program on page 10 of the MPS, note 5. I refer to the 'Output Statement of Financial Performance—Advice and Services for Good Local Governance', the other grants and subsidies budget 2001-02, \$34,000, and the estimated actual of \$1.494 million. I note that in the notes it states—

The increase in the 2001-02 Estimated Actual compared to the 2001-02 Budget relates to the following one-off items: carryovers for NCP from the previous financial year; and reclassified funds from Administered to Controlled for the Business Management Assistance Program.

I am aware of the difference between administered and controlled. As you are aware, the purpose of the NCP moneys is to fund the progress of local governments against their NCP reform commitments. On what basis was the Business Management Assistance Program reclassified to controlled and, therefore, used completely at your departmental discretion?

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

**Dr CAMPBELL:** I understand that, with the Business Management Assistance Program, it was agreed with local government that the money should be used by the Local Government Association to do training to assist councils to improve their business management programs and comply with national competition policy. On that basis, the money was actually allocated out of the administered item, which would normally have flowed to local government as part of their complying with national competition policy. On that basis, instead of being an administered fund, it went to local government. It was agreed with all local government that it would go through the department to the LGAQ to administer that program.

**Mr HOBBS:** I note that the administration costs as a percentage of local government grants and subsidies are again expected to rise to 0.73 per cent in the 2002-03 target estimate. I notice in your answer to a question on notice to one of the government members you said that for this last year you had had a change in the reporting procedure where you went from 0.51 per cent to 0.65 per cent and then to 0.73 per cent. But, in fact, it happened the previous year. It was 0.48 per cent before that. You have had a continual increase of administration costs against that annual grants and subsidies program. Could you tell me why that is happening?

**Dr CAMPBELL:** Part of the complication of these figures is the setting up of the new department about February last year where the allocation of overheads between the administrative part of the department and the part of the department that produces outputs was initially estimated last year. That was a complex situation, because the new department's budget existed only from February 2001 through to July. With the advantage of hindsight, we have now reassessed how those corporate overheads are allocated. So it is not a drastic increase in the program cost, but it is more how the corporate overheads have been allocated. We have changed the system internally.

**Mr HOBBS:** And the previous year's increase, 2001-02? The actual for the 2000-01 year—that was before your time—was 0.48 per cent.

**Dr CAMPBELL:** I am advised that the change in the 2000-01 and the 2001-02 target represented an increase of \$110,000, which was primarily due to enterprise bargaining outcomes. I can hand over to Lisa O'Neill, our departmental financial officer, who can explain that in some detail.

**Ms O'NEILL:** What Ted said in relation to the \$110,000 increase is correct: it did relate to salary increments and increases associated with enterprise bargaining. In terms of the variation between the 2001-02 target and the 2001-02 estimated actual that you referred to, the dollar increase is actually \$760,000. That increase relates to a more accurate apportionment of administrative costs across outputs. Previously, the local government services area had fully allocated its administrative support costs solely to the advice and services for good local governance output. However, during 2001-02, it was determined that it would be more appropriate and more accurate to allocate these costs also to the funding for the local government infrastructure and facilities output given the level of administrative support that is required by the grant programs. So the fact is that the administrative costs were not just allocated to one output as in previous years; it was actually split between two outputs. So while the funding output went up in allocation, the other output went down.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you for that. Dot point 6 on page 15 of the MPS refers to local government planning schemes. It states—

Co-ordinating whole-of-Government reviews of local government planning schemes and major developments to ensure matters of State and regional significance have been appropriately integrated.

I understand that the departments are struggling to sign off on their interests now and only six IPA planning schemes have been completed in 2001-02. How do you expect them to cope with a sign off of interest in 2002-03 with 117 planning schemes to be lodged?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am not anticipating any major problem there. It is going to be hard work for everybody, but the IPA planning scheme has been in vogue now for four years and it is a five-year program, and I believe that five years should be ample time for councils to get those planning schemes together. Until they bring them into the department, of course, our hands are tied, but they are coming in. I believe in the last 12 months we have seen considerable progress. Every one of those councils in Queensland that requires a plan now has their plan under way.

What we have to do now is get them in rapidly so that the departments can assess them and they can handle them in the required time—up until March of next year. The department is doing a lot of work to help the councils achieve that target. We have applied considerable staff resources and effort to assist local governments to meet those obligations. This has included providing ongoing advice and assistance to councils and their consultants in the planning stages. Officers of my department have also worked closely with state agencies to ensure that they fully understand their responsibilities and can respond in an appropriate and timely manner.

In 2001-02 the department also published the IPA plan-making guideline, which was a process for preparing planning schemes which provides detailed and practical guidance on drafting IPA compliant planning schemes. A significant component of that guideline is a new template. That template really sets out the whole process for councils to follow, and that has made a big difference to the number of councils that are now under way with their planning schemes. A further template relevant to larger councils is close to being finalised at the moment.

The department also has dedicated resources to internal training and guidance of departmental staff to maintain and improve the quality of advice that is being handed on to councils. A reference group of senior officers has been formed to coordinate advice and training regarding the schemes and to help provide a consistent response. So there is a lot of work going on in the department itself to help councils and their consultants to get those plans through in time. There is a lot of work being done.

**Mr HOBBS:** I am sure that the department is working very hard to achieve that aim and I commend them for that. However, it might not necessarily be your department's fault. If you have a situation whereby there is a rush at the end and councils just cannot get their various approvals through other departments—not necessarily yours—will you have some sort of contingency plan for some local authorities—and it may be their own fault or it may not be their own fault—that actually end up in March 2003 not having a legal planning scheme?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I believe that councils surely will have taken into account that after five years they face the risk of having, as you say, no legal planning scheme after March. I am sure that councils will have taken that into account, and particularly their planners, because that is

a pretty desperate position to leave a council in. I believe that we will get those plans through. I do not think there are too many planners or consultants that would leave their councils in that position.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to MPS page 4, whole-of-government priorities. I refer to the lack of an answer to a question on notice in relation to the total amount of funding across all state government portfolios and programs provided to local government. I asked you this question last year. I deliberately gave you the courtesy of asking this question as a question on notice because the question is almost identical to what was asked last year. Your department would be in a position not only to anticipate the question but also to be able to plan for it. However, it would appear that neither you nor the department are greatly interested in monitoring the whole-of-government approach to funding of local government, nor are you interested in or prepared for the estimates committee process.

I ask: will you make it a high priority to provide this information as soon as possible, because local government is your responsibility and there is funding from all sources of government that go to local government? If in fact some areas are reduced, you should obviously be well aware of it as soon as possible and so should the Local Government Association and other people. Would you be prepared to have a look at that one?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Well, that one was not answered—it was answered last year but, if you recall, it was taken on notice.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Because it took an enormous amount of work to get all of those figures from every one of the different departments. However, this estimates hearing is on this department and on this budget and we do not believe that we have a responsibility to answer for every other department.

**Mr HOBBS:** But isn't local government your responsibility?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Local government is most certainly my responsibility and of course I am keeping an eye on everything to do with local government. However, it is not my prerogative to give out figures on another minister's portfolio. I believe that if you want that information, you should be asking that question of the different ministers, how much money are they giving to local government. I think that is—

**Mr HOBBS:** Aren't you interested in how it is going? Don't you want to know?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am very interested.

**Mr HOBBS:** Then why don't we both—if we are both interested—

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I am not prepared to give answers for another minister. They have to do that themselves, on their portfolios.

**Mr HOBBS:** Well, you did it last year and it was fine.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, and it took a lot of work to do that. Also, apart from the workload that is put on the department, I just have a concern that it is not my responsibility to give figures out on another minister's portfolio.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to the \$2 million of state and federal funding in your department for the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality that your department received and your comment that, where appropriate and necessary to achieve outcomes, there is a probability of contracting peak stakeholder groups to assist program delivery. Why have you not honoured your commitment to stakeholders groups? Will you continue to use these funds to prop up your department?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The funds are not propping up my department; the funds are being used for the purpose that they have been allocated for.

**Mr HOBBS:** Not for stakeholders.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I beg your pardon?

**Mr HOBBS:** But not for the stakeholders? You are using it for your departmental work, not for stakeholders.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Those funds were never intended to go to individual stakeholders.

**Mr HOBBS:** They were, and you said so. You mentioned that they would be. It is your words.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What are you quoting from?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You said: 'Where appropriate and necessary to achieve outcomes, there is a probability of contracting peak stakeholder groups to assist program delivery', and that industry groups had been speaking with you on it recently.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What are you quoting from?

**Mr HOBBS:** I am quoting from your statement, which I have got here somewhere. If you keep answering, I will find it for you.

**The CHAIR:** I think the words 'where appropriate' and 'probability' are the three big words there.

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes, that is right. Actually, I think it was in your answer to the question on notice.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that what you said a moment ago is that the funds will be used to assist. That is not giving them the money; that is assisting, as we do with a lot of programs. Look, don't worry about that. I will just tell you that my department is committed to the delivery of four national action plan projects which are specifically aimed at building the capacity of local governments to be active participants in the natural resource management of their respective regions. Those groups are made up of a lot of different people with one, I believe, local government representative on each group.

Our project briefs have been scrutinised by the relevant regional national action plan bodies and have received a very favourable response. I am keen for the department to commence work on these projects, but until the Commonwealth releases the funds my department's hands are tied. State funding over the next three years is to be \$1.138 million, which will be matched by the Commonwealth. For 2002-03, state funding is \$0.421 million.

Three of the four projects are scheduled to run for three years and the other one for two years. The projects will target those local governments in the national action plan priority regions. They are not going over all of the state. Those regions have been identified by the federal government and they are western catchments around the Lockyer area, Wide Bay, Fitzroy, Burdekin, Condamine and Maranoa-Balonne in your own electorate. It would be nice to cover all local governments, but the federal government insists that the national action plan funds are only spent in national action plan priority regions that it has already selected. The written information produced by this project will be relevant to all Queensland local governments. We are continuing on with that work. It has been ongoing for some considerable time now within the department and it will continue to go on as the funds become available.

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

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page seven of the MPS there are comments that there has been a review of electoral procedures in the Local Government Act 1993 to establish a new trigger for local government internal electoral boundary redistribution and to otherwise facilitate the effective conduct of local government elections. Would the minister provide the committee with advice as to what generated this review from which the draft legislative proposals arose?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Department of Local Government and Planning conducts regular evaluations of components of the Local Government Act to ensure that it provides an efficient, effective and accountable local government system in Queensland. An evaluation of the workability of the Local Government Act electoral provisions was commenced following the 2000 local government elections. A discussion paper was released in June 2000 to provide the basis for public consultation and to stimulate discussion on several issues that had been listed. In addition, the department surveyed all councils for advice about practical problems or issues encountered during the March 2000 elections. Following the assessment of those submissions to the review and of issues raised by councils in the survey, a number of proposals were developed. The proposed legislation will establish a new procedure for initiating a review of local government electoral boundaries—I have to stress that is internal boundaries, not external boundaries—based on the approach applied at the state level for redistributions of state electoral boundaries. That will probably affect Brisbane City Council more than anybody else in the coming term, because we propose to adopt a model that will only require a redistribution every second term, unless more than a third of the electoral divisions are out of kilter in that first term. There are also a couple of smaller changes that have been agreed to by local government. One is about how to process a tied vote and another concerns allowing the returning officer a vote in the elections. At this stage under the act they are not allowed to vote, even if they are a resident, because under the current act they have a casting vote if there is a tied vote. With the change to that legislation, they will now be entitled to a vote. There are a few small changes such as that.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Also on page seven of the MPS it is noted that the minister's department is finalising draft legislative proposals following a review of the revenue raising powers of local government in the Local Government Act 1993. Would the minister explain the impetus for the development of legislation on revenue raising? What is the likely timing for the introduction of legislative amendments?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The revenue raising review is part of the ongoing evaluation of key components of the Local Government Act to ensure that it does remain contemporary and relevant to the needs of local government and the community. The review also responds to issues raised by the Ombudsman in the course of investigating complaints on how councils exercise the existing revenue powers. These issues include the need to clarify the power to fix general charges on goods and services and also aspects of council rate recovery practices, including the application of legal and administrative costs. I have considered the evaluation report, approved a range of legislative proposals and have obtained cabinet's approval to prepare that legislation. A draft amendment bill will be prepared by the Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel prior to the release for public comment. That should be done by late July or early August. I hope that it can be finalised and legislation introduced later this year. If that is achieved, councils could operate under the new legislation for the start of the next financial year. There are a few changes that have been proposed. They have come forward, as I said, from the Ombudsman and from councils that have concerns about different aspects of revenue raising. We are trying to address a lot of those issues. The discussion paper will go out and I am sure that we will get a lot of feedback on this one.

**Mr POOLE:** I refer the minister to page eight of the MPS where it states that the department published complaints management guidelines for local governments. Will the minister advise the committee of the purpose of publishing these guidelines, how they were developed, what the benefits of the guidelines are and what other newsletters and technical bulletins have been published?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There have certainly been a number of complaints in recent years, possibly because people are more aware right now of their rights to complain and their rights to expect an answer. The purpose of publishing the guidelines was to improve the management of complaints by local governments in Queensland through the publication and distribution of best practice complaints management guidelines. The development of the guidelines was an extension of the department's work to improve the resolution of community complaints about local government decisions and to explain the role of the Minister for Local Government in the local government complaints process, which commenced with the release of the brochure *Where do I go from here? A better way to resolve issues with your council*. That brochure was distributed in 1999 and set out the procedures, because there are still a lot of people in the community who think that they can write to the Minister for Local Government, who will overturn all the decisions they do not like that their councils are making. It was very important to clarify that. In December 2000, all local governments were surveyed on a range of issues relating to their complaints management processes. A total of 90 local governments, representing a 72 per cent return rate, responded to that survey. The survey results clearly indicated that the majority of local governments were looking for assistance in the area of complaints management. For example, 83 per cent of those councils did not have a formal complaints policy; 70 per cent of the councils did not have a documented complaints handling procedure; 90 per cent did not publish complaints data; 83 per cent believed that complaints management guidelines would improve their complaint processes; and 56 per cent indicated that complaint management training would help bring about improvements in their complaints processes. The benefits of establishing guidelines included a number of different issues. Clearly, they have been developed now over a long period of time. They have been distributed, and we are getting good results from it.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** In the 2002-03 budget highlights there is state funding of \$1.3 million over three years for a review of the SEQ 2001 regional planning exercise entitled SEQ 2021—A sustainable future. What is hoped to be achieved through this process?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The specific outcomes of that project include substantial community involvement. The program, with a communication and marketing strategy, will be undertaken in the first part of the program. This will involve a range of public engagement approaches throughout the region, including ongoing meetings and workshops with three regional community forums in south-east Queensland; a community values survey of 2,500 south-east Queensland residents to better understand the issues that concern south-east Queensland residents and their aspirations; development of a draft SEQ vision statement and consultation

with community groups about this; a series of workshops on exploring new regional management structures; and commencement of new consultation programs aimed at young people and indigenous people in south-east Queensland.

In the second part of the program there will be a major focus on regional policy development work through a series of policy committees that will oversee policy development and the evaluation of alternative urban growth scenarios for the region. New working groups will also be established and existing groups will be asked to review the current regional policies by exploring expected opportunities and issues out of 2021. The Rural Futures work will also be completed. New policy work will address energy and greenhouse, sustainability, indigenous involvement, regional infrastructure and coordination. Over the next 12 months the SEQ Quest regional sustainability model will also be developed and tested. It is a very big program involving a number of councils in south-east Queensland. South-east Queensland is the fastest growing area of the state. It is very important that proper planning is undertaken to see where infrastructure has to be and where development should be going in the next 20 years.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, given the community's expectation for a safe, healthy and livable built environment, can you please provide information as to what new building and plumbing codes were developed over the past year?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Seven new codes and standards were introduced through the year and there were two amendments to the Building Code of Australia. The two building code amendments resulted in a number of health and safety improvements, including better termite protection provisions, improved fire safety requirements, additional toilet facilities for female patrons in single-auditorium theatres and cinemas, better control of legionella, safer glass for louvres, providing building solutions for houses in extreme bushfire risk areas, and referencing updated Australian standards, including those relating to access for people with disabilities, fire detection systems, timber structures, windows and construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas.

Other board priorities which were substantially progressed during the year included developing stand-alone requirements for aged care buildings to allow for a single building to cover all care levels to support the concept of ageing, developing energy efficient provisions for buildings, introducing new requirements to ensure essential safety systems such as sprinklers, alarms and cooling towers in buildings are properly maintained, improving access to buildings for people with disabilities, and better sound insulation between adjoining dwelling units. Two new siting codes were developed for housing to replace the outdated standards previously contained in the standard building regulation. One code deals with lots smaller than 450 square metres and the other with larger lots.

A new model energy standard was developed. The new model standard for energy efficient housing in south-east Queensland was produced. The model standard is now available for councils to adopt. Some councils have already adopted energy efficient standards. We have put this model together to allow everybody to be more consistent with it. We have developed a new code for fire safety, which we heard about earlier, and a new code for residential services accommodation. These standards are all coming together now and will all be part of the development code.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** In the output performance section of the MPS you highlight a recent achievement of contributing to a more effective and accountable local government system by introducing a state legislative framework for the regulation of restricted dogs. Would you advise this committee what the key elements of the legislation are? Do other states regulate restricted dogs and can other breeds of dogs be added to this list of restricted dogs?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The legislation that was passed by the state government provides a state framework of minimum standards for the regulation of the four breeds of dog that are prohibited from importation into Australia. One is from Argentina, and the others are from Brazil, Japan and the American pit bull terrier, and also crossbreeds of those dogs. The key elements of the legislation are placing controls and conditions upon the keeping of those dogs, prohibiting the breeding, sale or exchange and requiring desexing of the restricted dogs, enabling the destruction of a restricted dog in specified circumstances and providing for local governments to be responsible for the administration and implementation of this regime. I think there are other requirements. For example, the dogs have to be kept in an enclosure. They also have to be muzzled and on a leash when in public.

The key elements of the Queensland legislation are based on an assessment of the approaches of other Australian states for legislation for the regulation of breeds of dog prohibited from importation by the Commonwealth. State frameworks to address this issue have been developed in New South Wales and South Australia. Victoria has introduced a bill and Western Australia has announced its intention to prepare legislation to introduce a substantially similar framework for the regulation of restricted dogs in that state. The legislation provides that the only circumstance where the state can add other breeds to that current list of restricted dogs is where the Commonwealth amends its legislation to impose a ban on the importation of a further breed of dog. The legislation is framed around those dogs that are already banned from importation. Councils can and are introducing local laws of their own that are banning those dogs in areas within their own limits. I believe they can also extend the breeds of dogs that they wish to ban in their own area.

**Ms MOLLOY:** Minister, on page 16 of the MPS under the heading 'Recent Achievements', dot point 2 indicates that the department provided an efficient and cost-effective appeals process for building work applications through building and development tribunals. What is the department's role in this?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** My department manages building and development tribunals. Those tribunals hear appeals against the decisions of local governments and private certifiers on building applications. These include appeals about the siting of domestic buildings where the council has adopted the siting provisions under the building regulations. Tribunal members are appointed by the minister and are selected primarily from local government and industry for their qualifications and experience in building and other related matters. Tribunals are widely supported by both the building industry and local government as a quick, cost-effective and non-legalistic way of resolving disputes. It has worked extremely well. During 2001-02, 45 appeals from building owners and applicants were heard by tribunals. Twenty-three of those appeals related to the siting of houses, car ports and sheds, eight appeals related to the issuing of enforcement notices, and the remainder dealt with a range of technical and liability matters. But of the 45 appeals lodged, 12 were upheld, 12 were varied and 21 were dismissed. It is a really good service that is being provided to hear appeals by people who feel that they have had bad decisions.

**The CHAIR:** The committee will now adjourn for 15 minutes. The hearing will resume at 5.45 to continue the examination of the portfolio of Local Government and Planning.

Sitting suspended from 5.28 p.m. to 5.44 p.m.

**The CHAIR:** The Estimates Committee E hearing will now resume. The first round of questions in this session is from non-government members.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I still refer to the National Action Plan for Salinity and Water Quality. In answer to a question from me you mentioned the amount of funding being used for the program. How many staff do you actually have in that program? What input did your department have in the production of the salinity maps that were launched by the Premier last week?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Those maps were launched by the Premier and Minister for Natural Resources, Stephen Robertson. I will hand that question over to Dr Campbell.

**Dr CAMPBELL:** At the moment there are no staff operating under those projects, but one of the projects—capacity building of councils—has in the budget the employment of three staff who would be involved in developing programs and moving around the state and assisting the local governments that are caught up in those regional groups to understand their obligations and what actions they have to take under the program. Those three staff are not on board yet, but if the program gets approval the intention is that they would be hired and brought on board, and there are three of those.

**Mr HOBBS:** How many would there be from last year's funding as well?

**Dr CAMPBELL:** We have not had staff employed for that program. The only expenditure will come under that program when it is approved and goes through the Commonwealth system.

**Mr HOBBS:** Did your department have any input, Minister, into the salinity maps that were launched by the Premier last week?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not think we had any input into that. That is purely something for the Minister for Natural Resources.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. Minister, I refer to page 27 of the MPS. I note that the user charges for 2001-02 were \$409,000 and the actual estimate is \$951,000, which is an increase of

\$542,000. I note that the explanation says that this relates to a joint planning information project in 2001-02 with Education Queensland. Minister, what was that project?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will hand that question over to Ms O'Neill.

**Ms O'NEILL:** It was contributions of \$415,000 from Education Queensland for the provision of a range of planning information services. Also, the increase was as a result of \$120,000 in additional receipts from workshops and training courses that were conducted by the funding output.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. I refer to page 30 of the MPS and the 'Statement of financial performance'. Minister, I note that taxes, fees and fines have remained static for the previous two years at \$742,000. However, your estimate in 2002-03 is \$760,000, an increase of \$18,000. What do you expect that that increase will relate to in relation to taxes, fees and fines?

**Ms O'NEILL:** The increase specifically relates to licensing of plumbers and drainers.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to page 15 dot point two of the MPS relating to private certification and ensuring that the assessment and approval system for development is accountable and efficient. Minister, in February this year you were given the results of a public review of private building certification and you have not responded yet. Do you know when you will respond to that review?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Are you talking about the LGAQ review for private certification?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That will be coming up as part of a building act. That should be into the parliament around September or October.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. Minister, I refer to page 13 of the MPS and the grants program. Last year in the estimates committee you stated in real terms that grant payments to local governments were actually expected to increase by \$10 million in that financial year—that is, 2001-02. The actual estimate for 2000-01 was \$449 million. The actual for 2001-02 was \$445 million. Your target for 2002-03 is \$437 million. So that is continuing to go down. Minister, what has happened to the extra \$10 million that had been provided last year, or will you continue to reduce the natural disaster funding back to a very low level?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The natural disaster funding, of course, depends on the disasters. If we do not have any disasters, that funding will go down.

**Mr HOBBS:** It was in the vicinity of \$50,000-odd. Now it is about \$35,000 or whatever the figure is. You must have had a good reason to have it there in the first place.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You are talking about natural disaster funding?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Natural disaster funding comes through with regard to requests and claims by councils. If we do not have the disasters, we do not have the requests for funding. So the figure is reliant on the number of applications.

**Mr HOBBS:** We certainly hope we do not have disasters. Obviously we do not want them.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think we are going well.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is right; we are lucky if we do not. But the reality is that if you do not allow for them what is going to happen down the track? I know you said before that you can go to Treasury and get some more. There must have been a change in the Treasury Department methodology for you to do that, because obviously the previous Local Government Minister always had a fairly high amount of funding available for natural disaster funding.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think the previous minister would be well aware then of what the needs were for budgetary consideration. I will get Ms O'Neill to answer that more explicitly for you, but certainly we have a figure in the budget. That will be increased if the need arises.

**Ms O'NEILL:** You are correct; there was a reduction in the previous year for NDRA. That was based on trends over the last two years where natural disasters have been declining, as have the claims associated with them. Further to the reduction that happened in the previous year, another \$3.5 million was not required at the end of last financial year. So we are fully covered for funding for NDRA if disasters do happen. The funds will be forthcoming from Treasury.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, I refer to the bay islands. I understand that there are about 1,140 blocks of land in the bay islands that now come under the environmental category and are proposed for purchase by the Redland Shire Council. Minister, are you aware that land-holders

have to wait until the Redland Shire Council area plan is released, which is due later this year, before they can lodge any objection to the plan? Don't you think this disadvantages those who have already had to sell? People have already sold their land. They have missed out on being able to object.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** You are probably crossing over a couple of different things here, but in May 2000 the state government agreed to a number of actions which were developed from the findings of the Southern Moreton Bay Islands Planning and Land Use Strategy. Those actions were intended to address longstanding land use, environmental and servicing problems associated with the islands. The council put forward some plans some months ago for acquisition of land on the island. Before we gave any approval for that at all, it has come forward now with a different plan and the 1,100 lots that you are talking about are part and parcel of that.

I believe that those people involved need to object to anything that they do not want in that plan. They have a period within which they can object. I am just trying to find here the amount of time they have. The council is bringing in different types of plans all the time. I will ask Stan Wypych if he has the date. Stan, do you have that date by which they have to object to it? They certainly do not have to wait the length of time that you are talking about to find that out.

**Mr WYPYCH:** The issue relates to the planning regime being put in place for the southern Moreton Bay islands, which essentially is going to be captured by the new IPA planning scheme. As part of the IPA planning scheme preparation process there is a stage called the statement of proposals, which is what is on public display at the moment. That period ends on 19 July, as I understand it. So people have the opportunity to put forward public submissions on some of the concepts and proposals which eventually will be captured in the IPA planning scheme. Your question, however, relates to the purchase of lots by the council. That is an initiative that the council itself is pursuing. It is not a state government initiative.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, the community has high expectations for amenity and livability outcomes to be delivered in a cost-effective, socially and environmentally sustainable way. I refer you to the control of mosquitoes on unallocated Crown land. Can you advise what negotiations have occurred in the last year and what is proposed in this forthcoming year for assistance to local government for mosquito and midge control?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I will take that on notice, if you like. It is not really for our department at all, but I will take it on notice and give you the answer to that one.

**Mr HOBBS:** Thank you. Minister, I am aware that some councils have submitted applications for the Rural Living Infrastructure Program whereby funding is limited to \$10,000 per project. If councils approach you with special circumstances in projects, will you consider increasing the limit to assist them to undertake and complete the projects?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think a lot of those programs have some flexibility in them depending on how many applications are in for the dollars that are available. I am sure that if a proposal was put forward that was slightly over we would give consideration to it, yes.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, in the MPS at page 33 in explanation of variances No. 16 you state that the reduction of interest earnings that went from a budget of \$1,197,000 down to \$503,000 in 2001-02 was as a result of owing the Department of Innovation and Information Economy, Sport and Recreation as a result of machinery of government changes. What were those changes, and will any interest earnings be paid to that department again this financial year?

**Ms O'NEILL:** The answer is no. Last year, as you know, the machinery of government changes occurred. Until 28 February, with sport and rec., or the previous functions—regional communities, communication and information—we had shared bank accounts when we were the former Department of Communication, Information, Local Government, Planning and Sport. So it was really just splitting up the moneys that were in that bank account for the two departments. So no, it will not happen again.

**Mr HOBBS:** Minister, dot point 1 on page 7 of the MPS refers to developing legislation to address emerging issues and evaluating existing legislation to provide a framework appropriate for contemporary local government. Last year at the estimates hearing I asked you if you would consider legislative changes to the act that would allow councils to genuinely construct and maintain an access road and give that council legislative responsibility to provide that access road and clearly remove any repercussions on individual councillors who are carrying out what the community would assume is a normal activity of councils. Minister, you stated that you believed there was a review being undertaken at that stage to look at the problem. Who has undertaken that review and what are the outcomes of the review?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will have to take that one on notice, as well.

**Mr HOBBS:** That is fine. Thank you for that. Minister, I note that you are providing information, advisory development and other statutory services to assist councils to improve their performance and achieve a high standard in local governance. I also note, however, that on the previous page—page 7, dot point 5—the number of full-time staffers has reduced by three from 49 to 46. While this is not a large number overall, it is still a 7 per cent reduction and significant enough. How are you going to be able to provide that assistance you talk about with reduced staff? If I recall correctly, a while ago you mentioned in relation to the IPA in particular that you had staff and resources going into that. But in actual fact the numbers are going backwards in that planning area.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is really an across-the-board figure. It does not impact on local government services.

**Mr HOBBS:** I thought it related to those staffing numbers.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Where are you reading from?

**Mr HOBBS:** It was under the staffing level, if I can find that.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Are you reading from the scale on page 6?

**Mr HOBBS:** Yes.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** If you are reading from that scale on page 6, the staffing for planning and development services has actually gone up by three.

**Mr HOBBS:** I found it in there somewhere when I was going through all those things, but I will move on. Minister, under recent achievements I asked you last year about the operational arrangements for the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council, and you said that the report on the outcome of the review must be tabled in parliament prior to 30 June 2002. I have searched the Table Office records, and it would appear that the review was not tabled by 30 June as required by part 6 of the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act 1978. I see that it is in the budget again this year. Has the review finished or are you still working on it? What is happening?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** There has been an extension on that until, I believe, December. Because of the Cape York study we held back on the Aurukun law review because they are connected. But I can tell you that section 109 of the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act previously required a review, as we would have said last year, to be commenced as soon as practicable after June 2001 and a report on the results tabled in parliament by 30 June 2002. That is the one you are referring to?

**Mr HOBBS:** That is it.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** However, the time line for tabling that report has recently been extended to December 2002 to enable the review process to consider the government's response to the recommendations of the Cape York Justice Study. There is a bit of overlapping there.

Part 6 of the Local Government (Aboriginal Lands) Act was introduced in 1995 to assist the Aurukun community to control sly grogging and drinking in public and private places in Aurukun. It established the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council, which comprises community elders representing the recognised traditional clan groupings in the shire. It was doing a very good job. It has the power to declare places within the shire either dry—that is, allowing no alcohol to be brought on to or consumed in those particular areas—or controlled, with conditions on the amount and type of alcohol that can be brought on to and consumed in those particular areas.

The Aurukun Alcohol Law Council was initially established on a trial basis for two years, with a sunset clause to take effect on 1 December 1997. The sunset clause was subsequently extended to 1999 to enable the department to conduct an evaluation of it. This review was completed by the department in 1998. It recommended minor changes to address administrative problems and concluded that the legislation should continue after that date.

The department has progressed the review to the stage that a draft evaluation report is being finalised, subject to the issues that are flowing on from the Cape York Justice Study. As part of the review departmental officers have visited Aurukun and conducted consultation with Queensland Police Service officers, the Aurukun Alcohol Law Council, the shire council and members of the community. So that review will now be brought forward before December.

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

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, a recent achievement outlined in the Output Performance section on page 7 of the MPS suggests that your department has facilitated coordination of state policies impacting on local government early resolution of issues, particularly through the work of the Local Government Reform Committee. What is the Local Government Reform Committee? How often does it meet and what are some of the issues impacting on local government that were considered by the committee?

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

The membership of that committee comprises the director-general of my department, Dr Campbell; the general manager of Local Government Services; the president of the Queensland division of Local Government Managers; and the executive director of the LGAQ. Those four people form that committee.

The benefits of having the Local Government Reform Committee in place have been closer collaboration between state and local government, leading to better designed and coordinated state initiatives affecting local government. It also provides an early warning of issues associated with state government decisions, programs or initiatives so that action can be taken to address them before they become too problematic. This informal but very effective mechanism leads to more effective policy development.

The committee addresses strategic issues in order to facilitate a partnership approach to addressing cross-jurisdictional issues, monitoring the local government system and developing appropriate responses where assistance, guidance and support are required. It provides a forum for negotiation of unresolved issues.

During 2001-02 that reform committee met on four occasions. It considered and progressed a range of strategic issues, for example the Department of Main Roads partnership with the LGAQ, or the road alliance as it is known, the review of the Queensland Grants Commission methodology and the associated review by the Commonwealth of its Local Government (Financial Assistance) Act, and the development of a project to simplify and enhance financial reporting by local governments. Other issues considered by that reform committee include private certification of building work, the role of the Queensland Ombudsman and the forthcoming cost shifting inquiry by the Commonwealth. So a wide range of different issues can be addressed by this very small but very effective Local Government Reform Committee. It is very useful and it is serving a very good purpose.

**Mr POOLE:** Minister, would you please provide some information on the work to date of the CityWest task force?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The CityWest task force is a joint initiative of the Queensland government and the Brisbane City Council. It has a charter to produce a framework for the future integrated development of the CityWest area and to advise the Premier and the Lord Mayor of Brisbane on ways to better integrate state and local planning and development in this part of Queensland's capital city. The task force is a unique strategic planning body in Queensland. It sets a new benchmark for cooperative planning between the Queensland government and the Brisbane City Council.

Some of the achievements to date include the draft CityWest strategy. That has been completed. That strategy signifies the completion of stage 1 of master planning. The strategy makes a number of recommendations for that particular area, including acting on CityWest's potential to be a nationally recognised leisure and entertainment destination. Improvements to amenity and access in that area will enhance the economic value to be derived from existing and proposed investments in venues and attractions. An improved CityWest can support and enhance existing educational, health and research facilities and emerging creative industries through collocation and expansion of complementary activities and by providing accommodation and services to workers and students associated in that area.

The next stage of that process will involve a formal review of the draft strategy by both the state government and the Brisbane City Council. On completion of that review the draft strategy will be prepared for public exhibition, and consultation will follow on from there.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Minister, I refer you to page 11 of the MPS and note that recent achievements by your department include funding of \$2 million for the Security Improvement

Program to improve security in public places. What funds have been allocated in the 2001-02 year? What funds are available for the 2002-03 financial year? How many local governments in Queensland have been assisted under this program?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** This is a very important program of the department. There was one round of funding in 2001-02. It was called in August and closed in November. Thirty-five local governments applied for funding for 68 projects costing \$7.8 million, with subsidy requests amounting to \$3.3 million. Subsidies of \$1.98 million were allocated for 53 projects in 26 different local government areas. The amount available for allocation from the budget was supplemented by savings in projects in previous rounds, which were completed under budget.

The number of applications received seems to indicate an increased interest in participating in this program, especially from the smaller local governments. The department has, with the Queensland Police Service, been conducting workshops for councils and visiting individual councils on a one-on-one basis to lift the profile of that particular program and to assist councils to develop projects and applications.

The objectives of that program are to assist local governments to improve their stock of infrastructure designed to improve personal safety and property security in public areas, to provide communities with a safe and secure environment in which to live and to reduce the incidence of crime in public places. The program has an annual budget of \$2 million to commit to new projects. Since the ongoing program was introduced in 1999-2000, \$4.13 million has been offered to councils from a total available budget of \$6 million.

There were insufficient applications in these early rounds of offers to utilise the entire \$2 million per annum and the unused funds have lapsed and returned to revenue through the budget process. It is important that councils are aware of this program and that they take advantage of the funds that are available. But since the program has been in existence, the subsidy offers total \$4.136 million. They have been made to 55 councils for 121 projects so far.

**Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN:** Your department does a lot to assist local governments financially. It never ceases to amaze me how rates continue to skyrocket. My second question is with reference to the Security Improvement Program. Would you tell us what role this program plays in the Beattie government's Queensland crime prevention strategy and if the program has been successful in increasing public safety and security in local communities?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes. Building Safer Communities, of course, is the government's crime prevention strategy and is one part of the government's overall approach to crime. One of the five goals of Building Safer Communities is enhancing public safety. That is what we are talking about with that program. The government aims to increase the safety of public places and to reduce the fear of crime through enhanced government support for security infrastructure through the SIP.

Improved street and security lighting reduces the fear of crime and opportunities for offending as well as increasing interaction in public places. Crime prevention through environmental design can improve the public's feelings of confidence and enhance the quality of life within communities. The projects are to be evaluated by each local government in consultation with any other organisations that are involved in the project after six months. Within 12 months from completion of the project, each applicant local government is to provide an evaluation report to the program assessment panel outlining the project outcomes. So we are following up to find out just how it is affecting communities. From the evaluations received so far, it is evident that the safety and security measures in these target areas have improved the usability of that public space.

There have been some quite remarkable comments made in those evaluation reports. The customer service desk at the Annerley library reports a significant decline in complaints from the public regarding the toilet block since its redesign. Complaints were received daily prior to that project. That is within, of course, the Brisbane City Council area. The Queensland Police Annerley precinct reports a significant reduction in complaints being received about drug use, vandalism, homosexual behaviour and assaults in that particular toilet block area. Another one said that it is pleasing to see a marked improvement to the site's use. Council maintenance records show a marked decrease in vandalism and repair costs. These are the reports that are coming back to the department about the program. I think that a really good part of the program is the fact that the councils have to report back to explain and to probably highlight the difference that these facilities have made.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I call the member for Warrego.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to page 15, dot point 6 of the MPS, the infrastructure charging plans. As part of the operational review of the IPA, it was proposed to modify and substantially reduce the levels of complexity of preparing and maintaining infrastructure plans. Can you give some examples of where the level of complexity has reduced?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that the preparation of IPA plans was always going to be complex. It is a long, hard job for any council, but I believe that most councils in Queensland—in fact, I believe that it is about 78 of our 125 councils—would have had to redo their planning scheme by this time, anyway. That was a requirement under the act.

The IPA planning scheme is complex and it has taken the place of the other planning schemes. But certainly there is a lot of work to be done on them. I think that the complexity has been reduced with the amount of work that the department has done in providing the template plan for them to follow. It has also been reduced by the amount of help that has been given—the number of seminars and the programs that have been put in place by the department to lessen the load on councils.

With regard to the infrastructure charging plans, some councils were struggling a little bit with that. We felt that the main priority had to be the completion of the plans before March. So just recently we have advised councils that the infrastructure charging plans do not have to be completed by March 2003. We will give them an extension on the existing headworks charging in the interim for up to 12 months so that they can focus their attentions on getting those plans finished. The infrastructure charging plans can come at a later date.

**Mr HOBBS:** Will that be by legislation?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I do not believe that it has to be, no.

**Mr HOBBS:** It is just regulation?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** We will just extend that time frame for that. For the existing infrastructure charging that councils are using right now, we will extend that for a period—whatever councils need—up to 12 months after. This is to allow them to concentrate totally on getting those plans finished. That is the important part. We will be flexible with the infrastructure charging plans.

**Mr HOBBS:** With reference to the Local Government Grants Commission, you state that the review of the methodology of the distribution of grants under the Queensland Local Government Grants Commission will be available in September 2002 and a final report will be expected in January 2003. What action have you taken to ensure that 'doughnut' councils such as Dalby, Roma and Goondiwindi—three unique 'doughnut' town councils—are not further disadvantaged by the grants commission formula? It is well known that these councils are in a unique position. They have also been active in developing a solution so that their needs can be met. Is there anything that you can do—or have done—that can help them? I do not believe that you are setting a precedent by assisting them, because they are quite unique.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** That is a very good question and it is one that I am concerned about, too. Last year, because the Commonwealth government was doing a review of its grants and its methodology of distributing the grants to the states and because we were doing a review of our own methodology in Queensland, I asked the federal minister at that time to allow us to leave all of the grants as they were the year before. Instead of going along with the program that was in place, that would have shown huge reductions for some councils last year. Because both of these reviews were under way, neither was completed. I asked the federal minister, Senator Macdonald, if he would peg the grants for last year at the same as they got the year before with no councils losing and a limit on the increases. After a few letters and after a bit of discussion, he did agree to that. So no council lost anything last year. That was a huge benefit to a number of councils.

We would have liked to have had our new methodology in place by June of this year so that councils would know where they are going, but the federal government did have recommendations in its review. It has not acted on them yet. It has not acted on those recommendations and it is not going to now. The federal government did call a meeting of state ministers for October last year to discuss that. That was called off, of course, because the federal election was called. But now it is including those recommendations and that discussion in the review that the new Minister for Local Government, Wilson Tuckey, is holding. So that is going to be held up. So there is no way that our review can now be completed for this year. I have written to the minister now—Wilson Tuckey—and asked him to do the same, or similar, to what we did last year for this year only. At this stage he has refused. I have written again and will continue to try and push for stabilisation of those grants for this year because I cannot see any point in

having changes this year and then turning around next year when our methodology is complete and when the Commonwealth's methodology is complete. We could be facing another scene altogether. I am trying to get consistency and I am trying to get an agreement with the federal government to minimise any changes again for this year. At this stage it has been unsuccessful, but we will keep trying.

**Mr HOBBS:** Will you be able to take up the plight of those three particular councils with the Queensland Grants Commission so that whenever we do have the opportunity to do our review, they will at least acknowledge they do have a genuine problem?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I cannot do that because the Local Government Grants Commission is an independent body. They have been meeting right throughout the state in different areas and talking with councils and having input from councils and they will be making those decisions at that commission itself. I do not have an input into the Grants Commission. They are totally independent. However, I believe that they are aiming, as we all are, for a fairer and more transparent system, so that councils do know where they are going.

Also, I have said on many occasions that I would like to see the methodology put forward in such a way that councils know prior to developing their own budgets how much money they are going to get or not going to get in that year. Everybody who has been on local government knows that it is a nasty surprise that you often get after you have already completed your budget and it makes it very, very difficult for councils to operate that way.

I cannot influence the Grants Commission in regard to any one particular council, but I am sure that those councils are putting forward submissions to the commission—and if they have not, they should—and the commission will be working very hard to try to get a fairer system.

**Mr HOBBS:** I guess the problem I have got is that I acknowledge the situation that they are an independent group, but you, as minister, must have some sort of influence. If, for instance, there are some councils under your jurisdiction that really are not receiving a fair go, there has to be something you can do in some manner or form, or maybe some other way of doing it or some other form of assistance? If someone is being ravaged to death financially because a system cannot be changed, surely the minister of the day must have something they can do, or at least try to have a look at what can be done?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, I am sure that something could be done or could be looked at at a later stage, but at this stage there is no decision and I think that we have got to allow that independent body to make those decisions without any interference. Then, at the end of the day, if any council is, as you say, savaged to death, of course everyone would look at the problem and see what could be done about it.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to planning schemes. In your departmental overview you refer to local government planning schemes and you say—

An efficient and effective approval system for development delivers significant benefits to the community and the Queensland economy through lower approval and construction costs.

Could you advise where approval and construction costs have in fact reduced?

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

**Mr HOBBS:** MPS page 1, paragraph 5.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** What was the question, again?

**Mr HOBBS:** In your departmental overview you refer to local government planning schemes and you say, 'An efficient and effective approval system for development delivers significant benefits to the community and the Queensland economy through'—and this is the point—'lower approval and construction costs.' In fact, why I ask the question is I believe that in fact in many instances our construction costs and approvals have gone up—much as we do not like it. IPA has not really delivered us any reductions that I can see, but you have obviously got it in here; you said it does. I am asking you: are there—

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think I am saying that it will.

**Mr HOBBS:** I am hoping it does, but I do not think it has. You are saying that it has gone down and I am wondering where they have gone down.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I think that it will reduce costs in the long term. At the moment we see some councils facing a lot of legal costs because they have been working under transitional schemes and old schemes and planning schemes that were there in 1994 when there were boundary changes, so they are facing legal costs at the moment. This is probably why I am so

very, very determined to try to meet that deadline in March of 2003, because no benefits will be terribly obvious until such time as they are all in place. Once they are all in place, then there will be benefits.

There will be benefits to developers and to development in general because of the integrated planning and the lack of requirement to go from one department to another, as has happened in the past. There will be a reduction in costs with regard to approvals because with any large development, time is money, and when councils hold onto plans for months on end, working through the approval system, that costs developers money. So they are the ways that approvals and construction costs are going to lower, once everybody is in place. Some councils are operating on that scheme now, but until everybody is on that scheme, it is very hard to itemise exactly where the cost savings are.

**Mr HOBBS:** I think that while we all aim for and hope that in fact those costs will reduce, I do not believe that they have yet. Let us hope that they do.

In relation to the grant and subsidy program, MPS page 2, dot point 6, you state that the pressure to increase or expand state government grant and subsidy programs needs to be balanced against local government maximising other revenue sources and competing expenditure priorities. Can you clarify just exactly what you mean by that and what impacts there are on local government?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes. Local government, like all organisations, both public and private, is facing demands to keep costs, and therefore prices, down. For councils, this means striving to keep rate increases to a minimum but, at the same time, provide the level of service that the community expects.

As demands and standards increase, councils have been getting greater assistance from the state. As an example, one can look at the list of proposals put to the major parties prior to the last state election by the Local Government Association of Queensland. For example, they were seeking an increase from 50 to 100 per cent in the subsidy paid toward external infrastructure for state developments. That would, in their estimations, be another \$15 million per year. They were seeking an expansion of the Rural Living Infrastructure Program, estimating an additional \$4 million for four years. They were seeking an increase in funding under the transport infrastructure development scheme—an additional \$13 million per year. They were seeking additional funding for the implementation of the integration of regional transport plans, estimating another \$10 million for that.

There are a number of issues here such as, firstly, the desire of the state to assist councils where appropriate. We are wanting to do that, but you cannot go on forever. I think Queensland's record of assistance to local governments is very much higher than that of other states. Secondly, there are the competing demands on the state budget. Thirdly, you should not substitute state funds for those which may be more appropriately raised at local level. That is something that has to be looked at—that we are not substituting state funds where councils could quite easily fund things either from their own budgets or from other sources. Fourthly, there is councils' perception that they have, to a large extent, exhausted their revenue base. Many councils argue that they do not have the capacity to raise additional rates or charges. I think there are a lot of ratepayers who would argue with that, because the rates go up regularly. However, is it a factual argument that they cannot do that or a political one?

These are matters that have to be taken into account, because everybody—whether it is state, federal or local governments or people in their own private homes—is finding it difficult to make ends meet and to make budgets go around. Of course, we have to start looking at a lot of these issues as we allocate grants and subsidies.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to the loan program. Will the minister advise if council borrowings have increased, decreased or remained static in comparison to the previous year? What is the trend?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I have got a fair bit of information on the loans. I do not know whether they have stayed static. The loan program is the administrative process whereby councils apply for approval to borrow through the department. In 2001-02, councils anticipated borrowing \$360 million for capital works projects, though it now appears that the actual figure will be just under \$300 million. Short-term overdraft arrangements were also approved as required for a number of councils. For 2002-03, it is anticipated that \$390 million will be borrowed. That is \$31 million more than what was anticipated in 2001-02, but as we saw in that year \$60 million was not taken up. It may not end up at \$390 million, but that is what is anticipated at this stage to be borrowed in the 2002-03 year.

**Mr HOBBS:** I refer to SEQ 2021—A Sustainable Future. This initiative will provide an overarching, long-term planning strategy to help guide future settlement patterns. As there will be winners and losers in this development strategy, will the minister ensure that compensation is put in place and paid to landowners who lose out on any future plan that restricts development?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The short answer is no. What does the member want compensation for?

**Mr HOBBS:** If people suddenly get a restriction placed on them that they really cannot subdivide or cannot even break up land into a reasonable sort of block, they will be penalised in some manner or form. Will there be some structure in place whereby people will be able to at least have a reasonable objection to a planning scheme? If there is a need, will a compensation scheme be considered?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** I thought the member was talking about the SEQ 2021 program.

**Mr HOBBS:** But what if they decide, in their wisdom, to put in place a structure whereby there will be no development? It could be the minister's place or anyone's place, a place in which someone has lived all their life. It could be a dairy farm or whatever, and they might like one day to sell and retire, but then suddenly it is worth nothing.

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The 2021 program is not really about that type of planning. That would come under the relevant council's planning scheme, and people would have the normal avenue of objection to any planning scheme that took away their rights. I do not see the 2021 program having that type of power. It is really looking at development in the future, at where development will occur, at where infrastructure should be, at the growth areas, et cetera; but the ability to change people's rights with regard to land ownership would still be in the relevant council planning scheme with the normal avenues of appeal by the residents.

**Ms MOLLOY:** It is stated in the MPS that building requirements from state acts are to be consolidated into the Queensland Development Code. Will the minister advise why the Queensland Development Code was implemented, and what building requirements are to be consolidated from state acts into the QDC?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Queensland legislation often contains specific building and plumbing standards. Compliance with those standards is made difficult as they are contained in several different acts under several different portfolios. Often those standards conflict with or duplicate those contained in the standard building regulations and the water and sewerage laws. In addition, they are generally overly prescriptive and therefore discourage innovation in building techniques. Planning schemes and local laws also include their own requirements relating to construction techniques, room sizes, on-site sewage disposal and access for people with disabilities, just to name a few. These often duplicate building and plumbing requirements that exist under state legislation. Consistent with government policy objectives of reducing the regulatory burden on business, these separate technical building and plumbing standards are being progressively consolidated into state building and plumbing legislation, removing them from other state acts and local laws. This will ultimately result in Queensland having a single, uniform set of building standards under the Queensland Development Code. The building requirements to be consolidated from the different acts into the integrated development assessment system and the Queensland Development Code will comprise approval requirements and standards for child-care centres. They are currently contained in the Child Care Act, not in the Building Act. The approval requirements and standards for pastoral workers' accommodation is currently contained in the Pastoral Workers Act. Approval, requirements and standards for personal appearance services such as tattooing and acupuncture are currently contained in the Health Act. We are endeavouring to bring all of those different building requirements under the Queensland Development Code. We will have one code where everybody wanting to build or develop can go to that one code rather than through different departments.

**Ms MOLLOY:** On page 17 of the MPS the sixth dot point states that the department is a leading provider of quality planning information and demographic analysis. What information will the department be producing in the coming year and who uses this information?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** A range of high quality demographic and urban development information and advice to assist both public and private sector agencies to make informed decisions in planning and delivering infrastructure goods and services to Queensland's growing and changing population will be provided from the department. The following statistical reports are proposed for 2002-03: housing update, quarterly; residential land and dwelling activity monitors, quarterly; demographic profiles from the 2001 census; and broad hectare study for the Gold

Coast and Brisbane local government areas. Associated with the release of those reports, information seminars will outline the key findings, implications and potential use of the information in a range of applications by clients. The information will be disseminated by way of reports, other printed material, seminars and electronic means via the department's web site. The introduction of online purchasing of the department's reports will improve the efficiency and accessibility to the planning information and forecasting unit's publications by the public.

The state is undergoing rapid demographic change in terms of population growth, distribution and composition. Combined with changing household structures and housing preferences, it is very important for both the government and business sectors to be conversant with the latest demographic trends and forecasts as they directly impact on those business decisions. That information is used by a wide range of clients in the public and business sectors and the broader community generally for planning, investment and decision making. It is important that we make it available.

**Mr POOLE:** The Beattie Labor government is committed to building Queensland's regions. Your department administers a funding program titled the Regional Centres Program. What are the objectives of this program?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The Regional Centres Program is a really good program. A lot of progress is being made throughout Queensland in a lot of communities to show the benefits of it. The government recognised that for a state as decentralised as Queensland to develop, its regional centres must be able to support social and economic development. The Regional Centres Program is a \$50 million initiative of the Beattie government providing subsidies to the 31 local governments in Queensland that have a population exceeding 15,000. This program is to provide infrastructure which assists the social and economic development of those key regional centres. Coupled with contributions from councils—they are usually dollar for dollar—this program is providing a boost of over \$100 million to Queensland's regions, and many jobs are created during the construction of those projects.

This program has been going for some time. Some 31 governments have been provided with subsidies. Right across Queensland we can see CBD redevelopments. Where the hearts of cities had seen business declining because of the construction of supermarkets on the outskirts, we have provided towns and cities with populations over 15,000 with the dollars so they can upgrade their CBDs. We have done foreshore developments. Recently, I opened one at Redcliffe. Apart from foreshore developments, there are community buildings, such as the PCYC building in Bundaberg, and other developments within communities that are providing projects that councils could not have otherwise afforded. They are not top priority; they are not sewerage, water or roadworks construction projects that councils will prioritise their dollars for, but they are projects that bring enormous community support, admiration and appreciation. It is a program that is very well supported and very much appreciated in a lot of areas of Queensland.

**Mr HOBBS:** In dot point 7 on page 7 of the MPS mention is made of the Local Government Reform Committee. Can you detail to the committee what major issues were considered by the Local Government Reform Committee in the last financial year and, of those issues raised by the committee, can you advise which ones still have not been resolved?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** Yes, I can. I answered this question earlier, I think, but I am happy to do it again because this is a fairly new committee and a committee that I believe is very helpful in reaching cooperation between state and local governments. The committee was established in 1997 to provide a forum for state and local government to work in partnership. The committee process enables the early identification and resolution of any issues of concern and acts as a clearing house for items of common interest. Membership of that committee comprises the director-general of my department, the general manager of local government services, the president of the Queensland division of Local Government Managers of Australia, and the executive director of the LGAQ. There are only four people on it, but they are high-profile people in both the state Department of Local Government and Planning and also local government. The benefits of having that reform committee in place have been closer collaboration between state and local government leading to better designed and coordinated state initiatives affecting local government. It also provides an early warning of issues associated with state government decisions, programs or initiatives so that action can be taken in the early stages before it reaches the stage of being a problem.

The committee addresses issues in order to facilitate a partnership approach in addressing cross-jurisdictional issues. It monitors the local government system and develops appropriate responses and provides a forum for negotiation of unresolved issues. During 2001-02 the

committee met on four occasions. It considered and progressed a range of strategic issues—for example, the Department of Main Roads partnership, the road alliance with the LGAQ, the review of the Queensland Grants Commission methodology and the associated review by the Commonwealth of its Local Government Financial Assistance Act, and the development of a project to simplify and enhance financial reporting by local governments, which has been acted on. Other issues considered included the private certification of building work, which has been a contentious issue for a number of reasons, the concept of best value, the practicalities of the March 2003 deadline for IPA compliant planning schemes, the role of the Queensland Ombudsman and the forthcoming cost-shifting inquiry by the Commonwealth. They are all issues that have been discussed and some of those, as you would know, will be ongoing. They are the types of issues that are being discussed by the reform committee. I think it is a very useful committee and it is doing a great job.

**Mr HOBBS:** How many appeals for building work applications were lodged through the building and development tribunals and what is the total cost of running those tribunals?

**Mrs NITA CUNNINGHAM:** The tribunal will be handling three new categories of appeals in the coming year. I think I itemised those earlier in the hearings. I have got the cost of lodging an appeal with me, but I do not have the figures for what it is costing to deliver that. I will take that on notice, if you like; I do not have that figure with me.

**The CHAIR:** There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the estimates for the portfolio of the Minister for Local Government and Planning. Thank you, minister and advisers, for your attendance. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard Internet Quick Access web page within two hours from now. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 18 April 2002. I declare the public meeting closed and I wish to thank all members of the estimates committee, the minister and her staff, Hansard and the research director, Rachelle Stacey.

The committee adjourned at 6.53 p.m.