

**ESTIMATES COMMITTEE B**

Mr G. J. Wilson (Chair)

Mr A. J. D. Bell  
Mr W. B. I. Flynn  
Mr R. O. LeeMr G. D. Malone  
Mrs D. C. Scott  
Mr K. G. Shine**ATTORNEY-GENERAL, JUSTICE****IN ATTENDANCE**

Hon. R. J. Welford, Attorney-General and Minister for Justice  
Dr K. Levy, Director-General  
Mr D. Schulz, Executive Director, Executive and Research Services  
Mr G. Hannigan, Executive Director, Legal and Corporate Services  
Mr P. Wedge, Public Trustee (Acting)

The committee commenced at 9.02 a.m.

**The CHAIR:** Good morning Mr Attorney, ladies and gentleman. I declare this meeting of Estimates Committee B now open. I welcome the Attorney-General, public officials and members of the public who are in attendance today. The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2003 for the areas set out in the sessional orders. The organisational units will be examined in the following order: the Attorney-General and Minister for Justice from 9 a.m. to 12 noon, the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister assisting the Premier in North Queensland from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m., and the Minister for Police and Corrective Services from 4.15 p.m. to 7.15 p.m.

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

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I should point out that the proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In that regard, I remind members of the public that, in accordance with standing order 195, strangers—that is, the public—may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the pleasure of the committee. In relation to media coverage of the Estimates Committee B hearing, the committee has resolved that television file footage without sound will be allowed for the opening statements by the Chair and ministers and that radio and print media coverage will be allowed at other times.

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

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr WELFORD:** Thank you Mr Chair and members of the committee for the opportunity to appear at these estimates. Obviously we are here today to comment on and present the government's budget for the 2003-04 year for my portfolio, the Department of Justice and Attorney-General. The budget provides further impetus for our initiatives to reduce crime, strengthen protection for victims and support legal consumers.

I believe over the last 12 months our government has initiated some of the most significant reforms to our criminal justice system in Queensland's history. We have overhauled the coronial

system and established the first ever Office of State Coroner in our state. We have responded to community concerns about child sex abuse by overhauling existing laws and introducing tougher penalties, new offences, more flexibility for the judicial system and better protection for victims in the court process. We commenced a program of revitalisation of the Office of the DPP to ensure there are sufficient resources and capability to vigorously pursue those who flout our state's laws.

We have acted decisively over the public liability and medical indemnity crisis, introducing personal injury law reforms to limit the effect of compensation awards on the costs of public liability insurance premiums. We are modernising the state's anti-discrimination laws to give de facto couples, regardless of their sexuality, the same legal rights as married couples. This first major update of the Anti-Discrimination Act since its introduction in 1991 also extended vilification laws. We are acting to protect the rights of legal consumers with the establishment of a new, independent watchdog to investigate complaints against lawyers as part of a major overhaul ending, effectively, self-regulation of the legal profession and for the first time including barristers in the formal process of disciplinary regulation.

Our budget for this financial year supports all of these initiatives. There will be a further \$5.3 million spent over the next two years for our drug court trial and \$2.1 million in 2003-04 to establish the Office of State Coroner. Modernising Queensland courts will continue with a \$107 million program for ongoing construction of the new Brisbane Magistrates Court complex, the Magistrates Court at Richlands and the refurbishment of our courts in Mackay and Cooktown. These funds will also underwrite additional projects, including a new courthouse for Caloundra and the extension of the courthouse at Hervey Bay.

We will accelerate the installation of closed-circuit television facilities as part of our package of measures to reduce the trauma and distress for children who have been victims of physical or sexual abuse. Revitalising the DPP will continue. More work needs to be done. Additional funding of \$1.1 million over the next 12 months will further strengthen the prosecution team and improve capability. Early next year we will establish the legal services commission which will deal with all complaints about the legal profession. The commission will not be funded by the public purse or additional consolidated revenue but by interest on solicitors' trust accounts as the regulatory scheme currently is.

We will be spending a further \$200,000 in 2003-04 to provide ongoing training for Indigenous people as justices of the peace, particularly in the Cape. This program empowers Indigenous communities by giving them a greater sense of responsibility and ownership for managing conflict and maintaining peaceful communities in regional areas. Some \$900,000 will also be spent over the next three years to implement new changes to the laws relating to birth, deaths and marriages and continue to improve the computerisation of records in that regard. I thank you for the opportunity to make these opening comments and I welcome questions from the committee.

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

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Thank you very much Mr Attorney and your departmental officers. My first question relates to the recent conviction of the Chief Magistrate on charges of intimidating a witness and also three findings against her in a civil court that she overstepped her jurisdiction. Would you be able to break down, for the benefit of this committee, the taxpayer funded legal costs which were incurred by the Chief Magistrate in fighting these particular cases?

**Mr WELFORD:** Legal costs were incurred for various aspects of the matters related to the former Chief Magistrate. Initially some mediation was conducted. That mediation was conducted by former Supreme Court judge and member of the Court of Appeal the Hon. Mr Justice Thomas. His fee for that mediation was \$4,000. For that mediation and for all subsequent legal advice McCullough Robertson have been paid just over \$91,000. During the course of the mediation the solicitor for the other parties to the mediation was paid \$13,266.

In relation to the civil proceedings in the Supreme Court, the additional costs for the lawyers for the other magistrates were \$100,000. Lastly, in the civil proceedings the barrister fees for Ms Fingleton were just over \$183,000. There were no fees in the criminal proceedings, obviously.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Mr Attorney, do you have a total of all of those? That involves the total cost of the mediation and civil proceedings both for the Chief Magistrate and the other magistrates bringing the proceedings.

**Mr WELFORD:** I will leave you to add them up, but I think it comes to about \$390,000.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** With regard to the criminal proceedings, the state did not advance any taxpayer funded assistance to the Chief Magistrate but preferred to wait and see whether the case was successful or otherwise?

**Mr WELFORD:** As you know, once the Chief Magistrate was charged no further legal expenses were paid and the Chief Magistrate was required to bear her own costs in that regard.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I think that at some other stage you may have been on record indicating that the government may take action to recover taxpayer funded legal assistance to the Chief Magistrate depending on the outcome of the court cases. Will the government be taking any action to recover any of these legal costs from the now convicted former Chief Magistrate?

**Mr WELFORD:** At no stage did I indicate that the government would be seeking to recover costs, despite the fact that the Leader of the Opposition repeatedly called for that to occur, contrary to due process and contrary to law. Last year, the former Chief Magistrate sought and obtained approval, like any other public servant—approval of the director-general—to be represented in relation to civil matters arising in the workplace. The director-general's decision was made after consulting the Crown Solicitor. It was based on a guideline made in 1989. That guideline is called 'Crown acceptance of legal liability for actions of Crown employees'. In turn, that guideline is based on a cabinet minute resolved in 1982. It provides for the Crown to accept full and sole responsibility for all claims, including the cost of defending and settling such claims, where the Crown employee has diligently and conscientiously endeavoured to carry out assigned duties. It has been standard practice for legal actions arising from the discharge of responsibilities by judicial officers to attract indemnification or the payment of legal expenses and any damages by the Crown. It does not extend to an officer who is charged with a criminal offence. The payment of the former Chief Magistrate's legal costs ended when she was charged, as I indicated a moment ago. The Crown Solicitor has confirmed that no claim can be made by the state for the refund of costs already expended.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Further to that, notwithstanding the fact that, as I recollect, there were about three findings in that civil case against the Chief Magistrate—as I recollect it, the judge overseeing the matter indicated that she overstepped her powers as Chief Magistrate insofar as directions which she gave—that is considered to be diligent application of her role as Chief Magistrate at that time and should continue to attract the support of the taxpayers through funding of that civil process?

**Mr WELFORD:** No, Mr Springborg. You are wrong again. The effect of the civil judicial review proceedings was not to find that the Chief Magistrate had overstepped her powers but that she had exercised her powers in a way that did not fully comply with the necessary processes for decision making. It was a judicial review of an administrative decision-making process. The findings of the judicial committee and the Supreme Court were merely that further processes should have been gone through in order to better determine whether a transfer should proceed or not. Those decisions and the technical flaws in those decisions were totally unrelated to the impropriety centring around the criminal proceedings.

I am aware that Mr Springborg and the opposition have continued their attempts to politicise the Fingleton case. I think that this demonstrates that the opposition—and the National Party in particular—have learned nothing since the Fitzgerald inquiry exposed their shortcomings more than a decade ago. They simply do not understand the separation of powers. They simply do not understand that matters to be determined by courts are determined by the courts and not interfered with by government and that the judiciary are entitled to operate independently. There is nothing in any of the decisions of the Supreme Court that justifies any other action against Fingleton beyond the action that has been taken.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So even though those findings, as you say, were based on judicial review and insofar as administrative procedures followed by the Chief Magistrate or implemented by the Chief Magistrate might not have been strictly in accord with the procedures that she should have followed, that was considered diligent for her to have been paid in excess of \$100,000 in legal assistance and so there is no redress whatsoever for the state to recover? That is diligence?

**Mr WELFORD:** Mr Springborg, you have continually called on me as Attorney-General to personally intervene in the Fingleton matter. You have personally called on me to intervene in a way that goes far beyond proper convention and proper process. The decision about whether a public servant, whether they be the Chief Magistrate or any other senior public servant, is provided with a legal defence in civil proceedings is a decision of the director-general based on appropriate legal advice. It is not appropriate for me to intervene, to supersede or to countermand

the due process for making these decisions according to the guideline, based as it is on a cabinet minute made when the National Party was in government back in the 1980s.

The simple fact of the matter is that the government defends judicial review proceedings every week of the year. Judicial review proceedings are proceedings designed to test the appropriate course of decision making—not necessarily the merits of the decision, but whether the decision was made according to sufficient due process. Those applications are made in the Supreme Court every day of the year against various government agencies right across government. None of those decisions of themselves justify the government claiming from the public servant the legal costs that the government provides to defend those decisions providing the public servant conscientiously seeks to make those decisions. There was nothing in the decisions of the judicial committee or the Supreme Court to suggest that Fingleton's attempt to deal with this matter was otherwise.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So basically what you are saying is that, regardless of who that person is across government, if there is some administrative finding against them and judicial review, then they are covered insofar as their legal expenses are concerned by the state?

**Mr WELFORD:** If the only finding is that the decision ought to have followed some other process, that in some way other relevant considerations should have been taken into account—with the benefit of hindsight in many cases—then that alone is not sufficient reason to pursue the public servant for defending the decision that has been made on behalf of the government.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So even in this case—

**Mr WELFORD:** That happened while were you a minister between 1996 and 1998. There would have been administrative appeals against decisions in your department and in others—right across government—and there is no evidence that in any case has the government sought to pursue individual public servants for what courts might have found to be flaws in the process of making the decision, whether or not the decision was right or wrong.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** These matters link together. I notice that you have indicated that there is a separation there insofar as administrative matters and the matter of criminality, which has now been proven. So you are confident enough, based on your legal advice, that there is a separation there to the extent that there is no capacity for the state to be able to intervene and recover?

**Mr WELFORD:** With respect, there is no link. There were criminal proceedings on the one hand and there were civil proceedings on the other. The criminal proceedings relate to an offence that has nothing to do with the process of decision making in relation to transfers. So there is no link and the criminal proceedings were not funded. The civil proceedings were, but they were funded in no different manner to any other judicial review proceedings funded by government in defence of government decisions right across every department.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Given that you are such an active adherent to the Fitzgerald reform process and you like to point to events of the past—and you probably have it sitting on your dressing table next to the Gideon Bible—you, of course, would want to make sure that there is going to be no issue with regard to conflicts or politicisation of the judiciary in the future. You would be very keen to implement the recommendation of the Fitzgerald inquiry insofar as judicial appointments are concerned. In relation to special appointments, he said that there should be consultation with shadow ministers. In relation to judicial appointments, he said that a similar process should occur to avoid politicisation and to give an opportunity to make sure that we get a more transparent process.

**Mr WELFORD:** The Leader of the Opposition again gilds the lily in relation to the Fitzgerald report.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I have read it over and over and over. There is no other way. Even a lawyer cannot interpret a shade of grey.

**Mr WELFORD:** It is a conversion on the road to Damascus for the Leader of the Opposition and the National Party when they start sprouting the Fitzgerald report—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** At least I have had a conversion.

**Mr WELFORD:**— when for a decade—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You have had a retrogression.

**Mr WELFORD:** For a decade they sought to discredit the Fitzgerald report and discredit Commissioner Fitzgerald. Now, ironically, and with the greatest cynicism, they seek to quote from

the report. The Leader of the Opposition and the opposition generally have absolutely no credibility when it comes to understanding due process. They know full well that what the Leader of the Opposition is trying to pull here is an absolute stunt. As the *Courier-Mail* said in its editorial on 8 July, there is simply no precedent in Queensland, Australia or Britain for an opposition party to be given a part either in the selection or the confirmation of judicial appointments and there is no good reason to make such a change.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** As we know full well, the Fitzgerald inquiry made a whole range of recommendations which were started to be implemented by the then National Party government and subsequent government which were probably unprecedented in the Westminster system. If somebody such as Commissioner Fitzgerald makes such recommendations—and it is not gilding the lily—I would ask for your interpretation of those sections of the Fitzgerald inquiry report. You can read it no other way. Not even a former Commonwealth prosecutor, who is probably used to seeing things in different shades of grey, could be so generous in his interpretation. How is it gilded?

**Mr WELFORD:** You can make whatever of this issue you like. The simple fact of the matter is that if you want to have a say in who should be appointed, then you express your view. You can write to me. You can consult whomever you like. That is your democratic right as a participant in the parliament. But the due process for the appointment of members of the judiciary in this state, in every other state and at the Commonwealth level is for the ultimate decision to be made by Governor in Council on advice from the Attorney-General, who consults the Premier, and that is the way it will stay.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** We are not seeking a veto right; it is a consultation right. You are saying that it is unprecedented. Would you consider that the head of the Land and Resources Tribunal was a quasi-judicial position at the very least?

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes, I would accept that.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I recollect consultation between the government and the opposition before that person was appointed a few years ago.

**Mr WELFORD:** So?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** And it worked well. There was not any sort of undue stymieing by the opposition, there was not any sort of churlishness or childishness in the process. We have always worked—

**Mr WELFORD:** That does not set a precedent.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Judicial, quasi-judicial—

**Mr WELFORD:** What consultation do you want?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** A Supreme Court judge equivalent.

**Mr WELFORD:** If you want to suggest a list of people who you think are worthy candidates, by all means you write to me, as the Law Society will, as the Bar Association will, and I will certainly give it consideration.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Given the number of unprecedented controversies surrounding judicial appointments in the last couple of years, I would have thought that, given our reasonable working relationship, we would have been able to potentially work through some of these political issues.

**Mr WELFORD:** I think that we do have an excellent working relationship.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You have done some pretty good reform in your time.

**Mr WELFORD:** And there has never been any controversy about any of my appointments on which I have consulted you about—none.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Certainly much less than a predecessor, anyway. But I would just invite you to reconsider your position on that, because I believe that we can be constructive in that area.

**Mr WELFORD:** Thank you. I am very grateful for your advice.

**The CHAIR:** The first section of time allotted to non-government members for questions having expired, I will now call upon the member for Toowoomba North.

**Mr SHINE:** Attorney, in your introductory remarks this morning and on page 1-3 of the MPS you have referred to the reform of the legal profession and that it will provide greater

independence and transparency in the complaints and disciplinary process for lawyers. What changes will be brought in in this regard?

**Mr WELFORD:** The changes I am planning to the complaints and disciplinary process I believe will help restore public confidence in lawyers as fair and honest brokers. Our reforms will raise professional standards, give consumers of legal services better access to information about the profession and give Queenslanders a complaints system they can trust.

All of the changes will be open to scrutiny by the parliament in the Legal Profession Reform Bill 2003, which I anticipate will go to the House some time in August. We intend to create an independent watchdog to investigate complaints against lawyers as part of a major overhaul that ends self-regulation. The reforms will give consumers of legal services in Queensland an independent, accountable and transparent complaints system.

The main elements of this reform will involve the introduction of a new legal services commissioner, with an independent investigative capacity to deal with all complaints; a new legal practice tribunal, chaired by a Supreme Court judge; a new legal practice board; and a public register to record any findings of professional misconduct.

Anyone with a concern about the actions or behaviour of a lawyer will be able to turn to the legal services commissioner and be confident that their concern will be properly dealt with. Serious matters which could involve a lawyer being struck off or suspended will be heard by the legal practice tribunal, chaired by a Supreme Court judge. The commissioner will be able to refer less serious charges of unsatisfactory professional conduct to a legal practice board. All responses to the outcomes of investigations will be monitored by the legal services commission.

The commissioner will not be funded from any additional necessary allocation from the public purse but from interest on solicitors' trust accounts, as I mentioned in my introduction. Interest on trust accounts has always been used to underwrite lawyer regulation, and I believe it is appropriate that that continue. Our legislation will bring these funds under the control of the government so that they are allocated to the various elements of the regulatory process, rather than leave those funds with the Queensland Law Society, as is currently the case. I think this will ensure a more rigorous, accountable and transparent process is applied to the use of this money.

We will also strengthen the disciplinary process for barristers so that they are subject to the same accountability measures as are all other members of the profession. These reforms will ensure we have an accountable legal profession with controls on conduct and competence that respond to the concerns of Queenslanders.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Attorney, I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS and the government's ongoing support for the drug court. Could you update the committee on the progress of trials in south-east Queensland and north Queensland?

**Mr WELFORD:** As the MPS indicates, Queensland's drug courts represent a comprehensive shift in the way the Queensland criminal justice system deals with drug related crime. Our government introduced the drug court because of the potential it offers in producing social benefits for the whole community.

I would like to claim the idea as ours, but the concept of the drug court actually originated overseas. In fact, drug courts began in Dade County, Florida in 1989. Nowadays there are more than 680 drug courts operating across the United States in different shapes and forms, all of which offer diversion to drug offenders. Drug courts are also operating in Ireland and Canada. Closer to home, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia have joined Queensland in operating some form of drug court. As you can see, the concept of the drug court has considerable acceptance not only in Australia but also overseas.

Although the concept began some 14 years ago in the US, most jurisdictions are still trying to find the right model to deal with the complexities of drug dependency and the level of criminal activity associated with that dependency. It is unfortunate that here in Queensland the opposition uses the drug court trial as a political tool, regularly harping at the government over its operations. It is disappointing that we are seeing such negative politics, rather than bipartisan support for such an outstanding initiative.

If you look at all of the various jurisdictions where drug courts have been put in place, you will see that it has taken time for the right settings to be developed. That is why we initiated the program as a trial. That aside, the drug court trial in south-east Queensland, operating in the Southport, Beenleigh and Ipswich courts, is now three years old and has delivered some encouraging results.

To date there have been 63 graduations—that is, people who have successfully completed their intensive drug rehabilitation orders. In fact, I think as of yesterday it was 65. There are still roughly another 60 people who are currently completing their rehabilitation orders. In north Queensland the drug court pilot began in November last year, operating out of Cairns and Townsville. It is only early days in this three-year trial, but there are currently 26 people on rehabilitation orders so far.

There is no question that the drug court can provide tremendous social benefits for our communities in dealing with the complex problem of drug addiction. An Australian Institute of Criminology evaluation of the south-east Queensland trial is now complete. The analysis provided by that evaluation report will help the government finetune the program even further.

**Mr LEE:** Attorney, could you advise the committee exactly what the Australian Institute of Criminology has found regarding the drug court program?

**Mr WELFORD:** I am pleased to advise the committee that the Australian Institute of Criminology has found the government's drug courts to have been a success in breaking the cycle of drug related crime. The evaluation of the south-east Queensland drug court found a marked reduction in criminal activity by graduates. The report found that very few drug addicted offenders who complete the drug court program are returning to a life of crime. The cycle of crime committed to pay for their drug habit is being broken.

Real social benefits are being delivered to the community. Every successful rehabilitation means there are fewer housebreakings, car thefts and other crimes committed by drug addicts who are trying to support their habit. This is great news for the community and great news for individuals and their families.

The AIC report states that, from the data available, the level of recidivism is 'significantly reduced for those who successfully complete the drug court program'. The institute highlights the enormous challenge in overcoming addiction but found that the drug court program was making, in its words, impressive headway. For example, it quotes one addict as saying, 'Didn't want to give up initially. Thought I had them fooled for the first month or so.' It also points out that 'drug court requirements accept that drug dependent offenders will relapse in the first phase of the program and this is a normal part of treating those with a chronic drug problem'.

There are some very constructive suggestions in the report about modifications to the program. Of course this was the reason for having the institute conduct this evaluation. In terms of changes, the AIC suggests there needs to be a tighter focus on identifying who goes in to the program—that is, those who are most likely to succeed or fail. The report states—

Early risk assessment tools need to be developed that can ensure that offenders who have a low probability of survival in the Drug Court are provided with more intensive supervision, or are deemed unsuitable, either at referral or within a relatively short time of the IDRO being issued.

The AIC also discusses the difficulty of getting it right in regard to diverting the right people—that is, those whose drug addiction is the key to their criminality, not those who are criminal and just happen to be addicted to drugs. Importantly, the institute recognises that the Queensland drug court program has been evolving over time and has become more efficient. The AIC evaluation and the final report by the Drug Court Magistrate, John Costanzo, will form the basis of future modifications to the program. On behalf of the government, I want to thank the AIC for the work it has done on this very important program.

**The CHAIR:** Attorney, I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS and the government's new diversion program in the Brisbane Magistrates and Childrens courts. Could you outline to the committee the purpose of this program and what you see as its benefits?

**Mr WELFORD:** This diversion program is a 12-month program. It is conducted in the Brisbane Magistrates and Childrens courts. It aims to prevent a new generation of people from becoming addicted to drugs and committing drug related crimes. Putting it bluntly, we are trying to get young people off drugs before it is too late. This program can help get their lives back on track, hopefully before it is too late—before they become hooked on drugs and turn to serious crime to feed their habit. What this program does is give people charged with possession of small amounts of illicit drugs for personal use the chance to rehabilitate through drug education and treatment.

This earlier intervention approach aims to divert people to counselling or treatment under a recognisance before they become addicted to drugs. Like our drug court trial, this new program has strict eligibility criteria. It is part of the Queensland drug strategic framework—a whole-of-government approach involving all agencies with a role in drug policy development. It also comes

under the umbrella of the national illicit drugs program, with supportive funding from the Commonwealth.

In line with the Commonwealth's national drug diversion framework, it includes all drugs. But to be eligible a person must admit guilt to possession of a drug in a small quantity, must be assessed as suitable for the drug intervention program and must not have been convicted or have a charge pending for a disqualifying offence. Disqualifying offences include offences of violence or sexual offences.

To date, there have been 167 offenders diverted to attend drug diversion education and treatment sessions. Of these, nine have been juvenile offenders. Attendance at a session means that a recognisance ends and no conviction is recorded. Those offenders who fail to attend are returned to court to be sentenced for the original drug offence.

The use of illicit drugs by young people of course is every parent's nightmare. What this diversion program does is give young people a wake-up call without sending them to jail. It helps individuals take personal responsibility and regain control of their lives. I believe that it is contributing to a safer environment for all Queenslanders and helping to reduce the considerable personal and social costs of drug use in our communities.

**Mr SHINE:** Attorney, I refer to page 1-4 of the MPS, on which it states that the appointment of a state coroner is the first step in the reform of the Queensland coronial system. Could you detail for the committee the changes that will occur and their expected impact?

**Mr WELFORD:** One of the most significant reforms of the Beattie government has been to overhaul the Coroners Act and create the Office of State Coroner. Until 1 July this year, when Michael Barnes became Queensland's first state coroner, we were the only jurisdiction in Australia without such a position. What we are now putting in place is a new system with a strong emphasis on preventing deaths and a more sensitive and compassionate approach to families. There will be a focus on identifying emerging patterns, and all coroners will have powers to recommend changes to prevent future deaths.

In this coming year we have committed \$2.1 million to underwrite this comprehensive change. The new State Coroner, Michael Barnes, will oversee the development of a modern and efficient coronial system. The Office of State Coroner will ultimately have a staff of 10. Four existing staff from my department's current coroner's section will be joined by six new staff. There will also be two new counsellors, who will be based at the John Tonge Centre in the Health Department but who will work with the coroner's office.

The changes that will occur were embodied in the new Coroners Act, passed by parliament earlier this year. Coroners have been given the power to make recommendations on ways to prevent future deaths. The categories of reportable deaths have been modernised to include deaths in care and there is mandated reporting of deaths in custody. The State Coroner will ensure there is a uniform approach on issues such as whether a full or partial post-mortem is necessary and whether an inquest is necessary.

We will ensure there is ongoing participation in the national coronial information system. This database will also give Queensland access to interstate experiences and trends and provide us with valuable knowledge in any necessary action to prevent future similar deaths. I should point out that additional funds have been allocated to the John Tonge Centre through Queensland Health to also provide the resources necessary to support the new system.

The system we are developing will provide better coordination, reduce delays and improve information and support for victims' families, including the provision of grief counselling services wherever possible. By developing a coronial system that is efficient, responsive and compassionate, we will not only respond to the needs of family members of victims of tragic accidents but also produce outcomes that help build safer communities.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Further to the government's efforts to protect vulnerable witnesses referred to on page 1-3 of the MPS, could the Attorney-General provide some detail about the improvements in court facilities that have occurred recently or that will occur over the next 12 months to assist victims?

**Mr WELFORD:** Thank you, Mrs Scott. This initiative has been one of the most significant initiatives in terms of modernisation of our courts in our state's history—not only new bricks and mortar projects but specific improvements designed to make the criminal justice system more effective, particularly when dealing with vulnerable witnesses.

In May this year I introduced the Evidence (Protection of Children) Amendment Bill into the parliament. That was the second stage of a radical overhaul of Queensland's laws dealing with child sex offenders in our criminal justice system. These reforms represent a sea change in the way the criminal justice system deals with child sex abuse. Not only will they completely change the environment for children in the justice system; we will be changing the way our courts accommodate the needs of victims in the system.

Last year—that is, 2002-03—we spent \$1.4 million on improvements to existing court facilities. These included closed circuit television systems, vulnerable witness rooms and sound reinforcement. In the next financial year we will again spend around the same amount on these facilities—video conferencing equipment, sound insulation and improvements for domestic violence or vulnerable witnesses. When we started this court improvement program last year a number of existing CCTV systems were upgraded to provide recording facilities for witnesses. At the same time we also installed sound reinforcement to cater for those witnesses who are softly spoken and for the hearing impaired.

These upgrades took place in the District Court in Beenleigh, Gladstone, Ipswich, Maroochydore, Maryborough, Rockhampton and Southport and in courts 15 and 18 in the Brisbane higher courts. Over the next few months we will install new closed circuit TV equipment in our courts in Bundaberg, Cairns, Gympie, Kingaroy, Toowoomba and Townsville. There will also be additional closed circuit television facilities installed in the Southport court.

Video courts, or video conferencing facilities, will be installed in the Magistrate's Court at Beenleigh, Brisbane, Cairns, Mackay, Maroochydore, Maryborough, Rockhampton, Toowoomba, Townsville and Southport. We are working also to upgrade vulnerable witness and domestic violence rooms in courts that do not currently have dedicated rooms or have no rooms at all. We will give priority to those courthouses which are most in need of those facilities.

**The CHAIR:** The period of time allotted to government members has now expired. I call upon the member for Lockyer.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, given your engagement or stoush with my colleague Mr Springborg this morning, I would inform you that I am not a member of the National Party. I do understand the difference between the separation of powers of parliament, the judiciary and the executive, and the problems that do arise and will continue to arise in the grey areas that appear, but the three powers are distinct.

Minister, are you able to inform the committee of what steps you have taken or intend to take to implement legislation preventing a convicted or imprisoned person from remaining in receipt of full paid allowances, regardless of the fact that that person is a member of the judiciary? I understand that it could not be done on this occasion, but I think people would look forward to some change in the future. Can you tell me what you intend to do?

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes. Mr Flynn, the current process is that the holder of a judicial office holds their commission until they are removed by Governor in Council. Governor in Council can only remove a member of the judiciary following due process. That is a reflection of the separation of powers, of course. If the executive could unilaterally move to not only appoint but also remove judicial officers, that would fundamentally breach the principle of the independence of the judiciary. That is why there are defined processes that one must go through before one can remove a judicial officer.

Those processes in the Supreme Court, for example, require the judicial officer to be brought before the bar of the House. Whatever finding of a court or tribunal might be made against that judicial officer prior to the person being brought before the bar of the House, none of that can actually terminate their formal commission until the process is complete.

Similarly, in the case of magistrates, although there is no process for bringing a magistrate for improper behaviour or illegal behaviour before the bar of the parliament, the process set out in the Magistrates Act requires that the Attorney-General make application to the Supreme Court for an order that the person should have their commission terminated. On the strength of that order, the executive then takes advice to the Governor in Council in deciding whether to terminate the person's commission.

So, on the face of it, one could well understand why one would feel uncomfortable if, following a court decision of illegality or impropriety, a person retains the entitlements that go with the commission. However, the simple reality is that, unless the person's commission can be earlier terminated, their entitlements continue so long as they hold that commission.

Whether we can contemplate some further measures which in some way deprive a person of their entitlements of office even while they hold office pending the completion of due process is something which would have to be given very, very careful consideration, because clearly we need to be careful not to breach that separation of powers.

**Mr FLYNN:** I accept your explanation. My concern was: do you believe the status quo should be maintained or would you like to do something about it? As for being called before the bar of the parliament, perhaps you would educate me on the difference between this case and Angelo Vasta, who was brought before the parliament.

**Mr WELFORD:** There are a couple of differences. Firstly, Vasta was not found guilty of a criminal offence by a court in the way that Fingleton was. There was a special tribunal established to determine issues in relation to Vasta. Further, the findings against Vasta, curiously enough, did not relate directly to his performance of judicial duties, whereas the offence of which Fingleton was found guilty did relate to the performance of her duties.

The other difference is that the termination of the commission of a Supreme Court judge can only be achieved following their being brought before the bar of the House to give an account of themselves, and then a resolution of the parliament is taken to the Governor in Council to terminate their commission.

In the case of magistrates, the process is different. Unlike Supreme Court judges or District Court judges, in the case of magistrates the process is an application to the Supreme Court rather than an appearance before the House. The application to the Supreme Court on the grounds set out in the Magistrates Act is then determined by the Supreme Court. They make a finding as to whether the grounds exist for removal and then, if they find there are grounds for removal, the Governor in Council can act on those grounds. What the effect of both procedures is intended to achieve is to put in place some intervening process that finds that there are adequate grounds for removal before the final decision is made by Governor in Council.

**Mr FLYNN:** Thank you, Attorney-General.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Mr Attorney, can you indicate to the committee how many applications you have had or you have received to date for the position of Chief Magistrate since you have advertised?

**Mr WELFORD:** No, I cannot.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You cannot indicate how many you have received or you have not received any?

**Mr WELFORD:** Well, I am aware that some have been received. I am not sure how many, because they come into the office as expressions of interest as distinct from formal job applications. I have seen a couple come through, but I do not know how many there are in total.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** By way of question on notice, would you be kind enough to provide the committee with further information on those expressions of interest?

**Mr WELFORD:** As of next Monday we will presumably know how many we have received in the course of the time that has been advertised for the receiving of expressions of interest.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So that is a no?

**Mr WELFORD:** No, I would be happy to do that if that is not too late. I do not know what the procedures are for the committee, but—

**The CHAIR:** It is a very patient committee.

**Mr WELFORD:** It is probably of more use to the committee to know what the status is as of next Monday. That is not to say that I would discount any expressions of interest that come in after that time but within adequate time for a future decision to be made. Of course, any submissions from the honourable Leader of the Opposition would be gratefully received.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I would have liked to have had the information today. However, I suppose the committee has to do what the committee has to do.

**Mr WELFORD:** Mr Springborg, I honestly say to you that I am not counting them because the time has not run out. Basically, they come in and they are collated in a register, and it will not be until after next Monday that I will bother to look and see what the list of expressions of interest are. Of course, one is not confined to expressions of interest.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That is true.

**Mr WELFORD:** Because consultation with the Bar Association and the judiciary may indicate other or better potential candidates who need to be sounded out for their interest. It is not uncommon, at least at this point in the history of our legal culture, for some of the most gifted candidates to not put themselves forward when one advertises for expressions of interest.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question relates also to the magistracy. Would the Attorney-General be able to indicate to the committee how many magistrates in the last 12 months or so have been on extended periods of leave outside of sick leave and long service leave?

**Mr WELFORD:** Long service leave and sick leave are the only periods of extended leave that I am aware are available to magistrates. There have been a couple of magistrates on sick leave, and I think I have responded to that in one of the questions that non-government members put to me.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Regarding departmental, I think, that question was.

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So they are actually referring to magistrates?

**Mr WELFORD:** Sorry. Okay. There have been two magistrates who have been on some extended sick leave. Both of them are now back at work.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Was that an extraordinary process? In both those cases were they actually using sick leave or did it go beyond that to the likes of stress leave?

**Mr WELFORD:** I am not familiar with the details of that. One of the magistrates was Ms Cornack, who, as you know, was in dispute with the Chief Magistrate. So I presume that part of her sick leave period was alleged to have related to the stress of that engagement.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Attorney, the reason I ask these questions is that I have received information—of course you can clarify them and dismiss my information in accord with better information—that Magistrate Daley, who was appointed last September or thereabouts, sat on the court for a few days before going on an extended period of stress leave. As I understand it, that lasted until about April of this year when she returned to work. Was there anything that was extraordinary about that leave?

**Mr WELFORD:** I think, in fairness to the judicial officer, it would not be appropriate for me to go into too much detail in relation to that, other than to assure you that the sick leave was genuine and related to a near-death in the family of the magistrate.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I understand that there were some issues there in the latest stages of that. I was just wondering if there were any extraordinary issues. That is fair enough.

**Mr WELFORD:** Like you, I would be concerned at any extended sick leave taken by a magistrate only recently appointed. It would, as I guess you are indicating, raise questions about the emotional capacity of the magistrate to handle the rigours of judicial office.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It is not an unreasonable—

**Mr WELFORD:** No, I was not indicating any concern with your question.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** That deals with one magistrate. Are there any other situations where other magistrates are using basically most of their accrued entitlements or have actually exceeded that and are wanting to leave the magistracy or are awaiting further decisions insofar as maybe deciding that they have had enough?

**Mr WELFORD:** I have to be cautious about what I say here for fear of insulting the magistracy.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I was trying to be cautious.

**Mr WELFORD:** Obviously in the circumstances of the imbroglio in which the magistracy has been embroiled lately I might not be entirely unhappy if there were some who sought to leave. The fact of the matter is that I am not aware of anyone planning to leave. There is one magistrate who I did not include in the two before, I should mention, who has been on sick leave following an accident which caused the magistrate injury. There is currently an application by me in the Supreme Court for orders that that magistrate is appropriate to terminate. I understand that magistrate is not opposing those orders.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Right. That magistrate has been on sick leave for possibly up to 12 months or beyond at this stage?

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Further to the issue of appointments to the magistracy, there have been issues surrounding the court in the last couple of years such as the impact of legislative changes in 1999 which clarified the power of the Chief Magistrate insofar as transferral, relocation and the right of appeal in their dealings with magistrates. When you have to allocate 75 people positions around the state it can be very difficult. When you are appointing magistrates—when you ring them or write to them—do you indicate to them that the final decision of where they need to be located or relocated is with the Chief Magistrate? Do you ask them if they are comfortable in that process before you finally say, 'Well, you've got the job'? The reason I ask is that somebody has to run the show and they need to be aware that there is Mount Isa and other areas around Queensland which have to be serviced.

**Mr WELFORD:** I agree, and I think that is a good point. I do not specifically ask potential appointees whether they are comfortable with the Chief Magistrate making a decision. I presume that they know that that is part of the role of the Chief Magistrate. In some ways the changes in I think you said 1999—

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I think it was 1999 if I remember rightly.

**Mr WELFORD:** Those changes aimed to clarify an appeal process, not so much the powers of the Chief Magistrate.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** But it does cause some concern with the Chief Magistrate or acting Chief Magistrate?

**Mr WELFORD:** Indeed. What I do make clear, however—and I have done this with every magistrate I have so far appointed—is that there is an expectation that they serve in regional areas. The way the process works is that under the act the Attorney-General of the day can appoint a magistrate—they do not have to—to a particular court for a specified time. My view is that I should exercise that responsibility in a way that ensures that a magistrate is at least given some initial certainty about where they should serve, and it is not necessarily in south-east Queensland. My recent appointments have been in Cairns and other places. The idea is to give a person an initial term of service at a particular court and thereafter make clear to them that, following that initial term that is specified in the Governor in Council minute that appoints them, they are then liable to be transferred according to the needs of the court as assessed by the Chief Magistrate.

The amendments to the process that were instituted following the dispute between the previous Chief Magistrate, Mr Deer, and Magistrate Payne added to that process a process of appeal to a judicial committee to ensure that the Chief Magistrate takes into account relevant considerations. My view is that there is a primary responsibility on all magistrates to be prepared to serve in regional areas and that each magistrate should be given the opportunity to comment upon a pending placement that the Chief Magistrate has in mind. It was the adequacy of that process that was contested in the most recent matters. Subject to that, a person cannot refuse to be transferred to a regional area except in the most exceptional circumstances. That perhaps needs to be clarified.

**Mr BELL:** Attorney, I refer to page 1-4 of your portfolio statement and the comments you made in answer to a question from Mr Shine earlier today concerning the Office of the State Coroner. I am interested in the Office of the State Coroner, particularly the grief counselling services. Who will be conducting the grief counselling services? Will those two new counsellors attached to the John Tonge Centre be expected to provide the services throughout the whole state or will there be outside agencies involved? If so, will you be providing any funding to outside agencies?

**Mr WELFORD:** The coronial system is in effect a multidepartment system. It is primarily steered from the Office of the State Coroner but, as you point out, it has associated with it services of post-mortem and grief counselling provided by the Health Department through John Tonge. The two counsellors at John Tonge will be the primary reference points for grief counselling, but they will be in a position to liaise with health services in other regional areas where there are health facilities—hospitals and the like—to refer people in regional areas to other counselling as well. The counselling services that are available through Queensland Health generally I presume will be available in regional areas. References to those services will be coordinated by the people in John Tonge who have a specific charter to assist in coronial inquiries.

**Mr BELL:** Will those persons being counselled be required to pay a fee for service?

**Mr WELFORD:** No.

**Mr BELL:** Also on counselling I refer to an answer to a question I gave on notice concerning counselling services where people are referred by the drug courts. You responded in relation to the monies provided. My question was specific to the Gold Coast, but I now ask more generally about the whole state. You said that the monies provided for independent counselling services were a matter for the Health Department. In view of the fact that the drug court system is expanding and there would be more and more referrals to independent counselling services, is it not reasonable that your department or Corrective Services should provide some additional funding to these independent counselling services rather than giving them a greater workload and leaving them to try to get what they can from the Health Department?

**Mr WELFORD:** It does not quite work like that. The way the budget allocates funding for the drug courts is for the three primary departments—that is, Corrective Services, Health and Justice—to collectively put forward a budget for the provision of additional places. The departments first assess how many additional places we think can be managed or provided for. For example, in the north Queensland trial in Cairns and Townsville there are 40 places of which 20 are in residential rehabilitation centres. An assessment of what the cost is of providing those, together with the cost of running the Corrective Services supervision and the drug court itself, is made and then a budget is formulated for all agencies to be allocated their share.

In relation to the counselling, counselling and the appointment of the appropriate rehabilitation services is coordinated under the supervision of Justice but by the Health Department because the Health Department has the skills in identifying who is qualified and who is not. The funds for that component of the drug court program are allocated to Health. Health then advertises for tenders to provide the rehabilitation and counselling services. For rehabilitation it almost invariably comes from non-government community organisations such as St Vincent de Paul or Mirikai on the Gold Coast. Health then processes those bids and engages contractually the rehabilitation services to provide the services.

**Mr BELL:** Does it follow then that the number of people who can be referred by the drug courts—

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time for non-government members' questions at this stage has expired.

**Mr WELFORD:** More or less is the answer, yes.

**Mr LEE:** In relation to SPER, I refer the Attorney to page 1-13 of the MPS in reference to the increased workload, and in particular the provision of \$1 million in additional funding. Could the Attorney advise the committee of the effectiveness of SPER since its introduction?

**Mr WELFORD:** SPER, the State Penalties Enforcement Registry, has been the most successful approach to collecting unpaid fines that has been undertaken. I have to say that I am very pleased with the work that our team at SPER are doing. They have a huge task. They are receiving millions of dollars of fines and court orders every month as well as local government fines. It is a huge transaction processing responsibility. Since it was introduced in November 2000 they have finalised nearly 560,000 fines and generated over \$100 million in collections. Notwithstanding that, they are still struggling to keep up with the volume of fines that are coming in in terms of pursuing them.

Inevitably there are always a small number of fines that cannot be effectively recovered; you cannot get blood out of a stone. This has been the most sophisticated, the most systematic effort yet applied by government to recovering outstanding court orders and fines. SPER places an emphasis on collecting the fine rather than just sending people to jail, and that is a big difference between this and previous systems. It has undergone a staged implementation and the system is largely now fully established, although I am working with the SPER team to continually improve our efforts and refine our approach to successfully recovering a higher and higher proportion of the fines that are outstanding.

Part of this involves not only having a call centre and proactively mailing out to people who have outstanding fines to remind them of their obligations and the capacity to enter into instalment payments but also opening up payment options, such as payment through Centrepay, the courts and through Australia Post. BPay Internet payment facilities are now available or coming online. The enforcement of unpaid fines is being backed up by the use of licence suspension, warrants for execution against property, and fine collection notices on employers and banks.

We are coordinating between government agencies such as Transport and the Electoral Commission to help find the latest address for people, because people sometimes unwittingly fail

to notify agencies when they change address having not paid their outstanding fine. A range of measures is being put in place to recover more and more of the fines that are being provided to SPER for recovery.

**The CHAIR:** I refer you to page 1-4 of the MPS and the Director of Public Prosecutions revitalisation program that you commenced last year. Could you explain where this program is up to and what difference you believe it is making?

**Mr WELFORD:** As I have stated on other occasions, I am very keen to support our Director of Public Prosecutions in establishing the best Office of the DPP of any jurisdiction in the country. It needs to be acknowledged that the Office of the DPP has for some years had to deal with not only an increasing workload but also incrementally new areas of responsibility, and this has placed considerable pressure on the staff of the office, including both senior prosecutors and junior legal officers. Having said that, I want to place on record my congratulations on the outstanding effort of legal officers and prosecutors in the Office of the DPP. They conduct the most serious, and sometimes the most complex, criminal prosecutions in our state. They are the bulwark in the protection of the public interest in dealing with crime. It is important to investigate crime and to detect crime, but all the best police work in the world will not bear fruit unless we have an effective prosecution office that ensures crime does not go unsanctioned.

Last year, the government committed an additional \$5.5 million over four years to ensure the Office of the DPP can continue to provide its service. I will be doing more work in the coming year and, of course, seeking additional funds in future years. Eleven new staff have been employed over recent months, including two principal Crown prosecutors in Brisbane. They will represent the Crown at the highest level and bring a high level of experience and knowledge to bear in serious prosecution matters. Three new solicitor advocates positions have been created and they will play a key role in ongoing training, mentoring and direct supervision of junior legal staff. Five new legal officer positions are being created in Brisbane and an additional legal officer in the Beenleigh office to help reduce the case loads carried by individual officers.

A number of other steps have also been initiated. An intensive training program for legal officers and legally qualified administrative staff is being put in place. This is to address the shortage of experienced legal officers in the office and the need to train up and strengthen the capacity of the office, particularly junior legal officers. Advocacy training is being provided for regional legal officers out of Brisbane, and regional Crown prosecutors are brought to Brisbane to prosecute from time to time so that there is an interaction of professional experience.

**The CHAIR:** The committee will now take a short recess.

Sitting suspended from 10.20 a.m. to 10.33 a.m.

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

**Mr SHINE:** In answer to the previous question, you were referring to the DPP's revitalisation and you indicated that there was more work to be done in the coming year. You may have covered that area to the extent that you wanted to but, if not, could you give further details about what is planned for this coming year?

**Mr WELFORD:** More work needs to be done in the coming year to improve the processes that impact on the Office of the DPP. We are going to look at the process of listing criminal trials to ensure smoother coordination between the Office of the DPP and the courts. We want to look at the fees paid to private counsel, which have not changed for many years and which by any measure are doing things on the cheap at the moment. We need to provide for that. I think it is more important from my perspective, though, that we increase the capacity of the office itself to deal with an increasing share of the cases that come before it. The convenience of briefing out really is useful in special cases such as the Fingleton case, for example, or in cases where matters are suddenly listed and all in-house prosecutors are tied up and it is necessary to brief out. But of course it is far from ideal to brief out at short notice.

The things that I will be working with the director on are things designed to, firstly, improve the capacity of the office through training, upskilling and the employment of new, more experienced staff, and also looking at improving the way in which the whole criminal justice system runs so as to enable the office to function with fewer impediments to its own efficiency. Obviously, there are a number of challenges. These things are not going to be solved overnight. Ultimately, they may require more money still because with increasing population growth, increasing demands on the system generally, we need to ensure that the Office of the DPP is able to fulfil the important statutory functions that it holds as the state's prime, independent

prosecution office for indictable offences. As I have indicated to the parliament and to this committee in previous years, I have a special passion for ensuring that the Office of the DPP functions well. I will be working on that further over the next 12 months.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Attorney, I refer you to page 2-6 of the MPS and the work of the Electoral Commission. Could you explain what the commission is doing to provide information to people about the electoral system and their rights and responsibilities?

**Mr WELFORD:** Firstly, I would like to pay tribute to our new Electoral Commissioner, Mr Bob Longland. He has taken the saddle of the role of Electoral Commissioner and steered the Electoral Commission with great skill and diligence over the last 12 months. He came in at a time when our government introduced some of the strongest and most transparent electoral system reforms anywhere in Australia. This has required the Queensland Electoral Commission to exercise a measure of scrutiny over political party preselection processes that does not apply anywhere else in the country. I am pleased to say that that has been handled very professionally and without any glitches whatsoever.

This year some new initiatives are proposed by the Electoral Commission. We are in the final phase of Queensland's electoral cycle. It is important that the Electoral Commission raises community awareness about the obligations of citizenship. A new program to raise awareness will be targeting various groups—for example, young people, Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, people in rural and remote areas—to ensure that their voices are heard in the election process.

Already the campaign for young people has featured 30,000 postcards printed with an enrolment message urging enrolment. These have been placed in coffee shops, cinemas and other venues frequented by young people, including university and education venues. Radio ads have encouraged young people to be involved. These were broadcast during tertiary exam times when young people are often at home studying for their exams and listening to the radio. Posters have been produced again sending out the message encouraging enrolment.

For older Queenslanders the campaign will include press advertisements in specialist media, ads on talkback radio and, of course, posters and brochures that are similarly appropriate in facilities where aged people are cared for. In rural and remote areas there have already been some advertisements in newspapers encouraging people to keep their enrolment details up to date because there are obviously shifting enrolments across the state. Keeping people's enrolments current is very important for the accuracy of the electoral roll. For indigenous people, again the commission has been encouraging enrolment through broadcast over ATSI radio stations and specialist publications circulating in those communities and has used identities such as Broncos Rugby League star Steve Renouf to be the public face of the commission's campaign with ATSI people.

**Mr LEE:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-4 of the MPS and the reference to the plan to construct a new courthouse at Caloundra and also to refurbish the facilities at Hervey Bay. Could you outline the plans for these new and refurbished courthouses?

**Mr WELFORD:** These regional courthouse refurbishments and upgrades are part of an ongoing or rolling program of improvement of our courts throughout the state. The \$6 million complex at Caloundra will be built in Gregson Place adjacent to the police station. This new, modern facility will cater for the needs of a growing population in and around the Caloundra area. Some \$2.4 million of the total funding has been allocated in this year's state budget for work scheduled to commence in April next year. We anticipate the court will be operating by 2005.

Within the new Caloundra court complex there will be two Magistrate's Courts, a mediation room, holding facilities, a registry office and public waiting areas, including interview rooms. It will incorporate the latest technology, such as closed circuit TV facilities. Child witnesses and sexual assault victims will be able to give evidence from a separate room in the court precinct. The design also allows for the expansion of up to six court rooms in future to meet the needs of the Sunshine Coast's growing population. It will replace the existing 40-year-old Caloundra Court House which is no longer suitable for use. It has recently been the subject of some submissions to me from the Caloundra council. For some time we have not been able to record proceedings because the location and acoustics of the existing building simply make it too noisy.

In Hervey Bay we will be spending about \$1.7 million upgrading the courthouse there. I visited the courthouse only a few weeks ago. The rapid growth in Hervey Bay since the courthouse was built in 1995 has created the need for these improvements. An additional courtroom will be built, complete with magistrates chambers or chambers for visiting District Court judges, jury room facilities, a public gallery and a holding cell. The new courtroom will be used for

circuit sittings of the District Court and possibly the Supreme Court and enable serious criminal matters to be heard locally, easing the load on the Maryborough court. We will incorporate the latest technology, such as closed circuit TV, in the new Hervey Bay facility. There will also be new interview rooms to provide privacy for victims of domestic violence and video conferencing facilities so that hopefully video conferencing of bail applications and the like can be held with the Maryborough Correctional Centre.

Accommodation for the Hervey Bay Alternate Dispute Resolution Centre will also be provided within the extension. We expect work to begin before the end of this year with completion during next year.

**The CHAIR:** Mr Attorney, can I take you to other current projects outside Brisbane—such as Mackay, Richlands and the Brisbane western districts and Cooktown—referred to on page 1-4 of the MPS. Could you provide details of the costs of these projects and the progress being made?

**Mr WELFORD:** Our government is spending almost \$17 million in total on these three projects. All of them will enhance delivery of justice in these areas. Some \$11.4 million is being spent on redeveloping the Mackay Court House. It, along with our other upgrades, will be among the state's most modern judicial centres. The project reflects our commitment to better access to justice for people living in regional Queensland. As part of the Smart State approach, the new court complex will incorporate the latest technology and cater for the growth of the region. There will be five courtrooms—two for the Magistrate's Court, two for the Supreme Court and District Court and one multipurpose courtroom. There will also be new interview rooms, improved facilities for victims of domestic violence, access for the disabled and better amenities for the public and court staff.

I heard an anecdote the other month of solicitors interviewing their clients in a toilet cubicle. It turned out that they could not find the interview room, although there is one there at the moment. The complex will incorporate closed circuit television facilities to enable child witnesses and sexual assault victims to give evidence from a separate room in the court precinct. We expect to complete construction of the new building in about November this year. The refurbishment of the existing building will be completed by the middle of next year.

A new \$4.5 million complex on the corner of Archerfield and Progress roads at Richlands will serve Brisbane's western districts. It will replace the existing ailing Inala Court House. Construction is well under way and we anticipate work will be completed, weather permitting, by Christmas this year. The new court complex at Richlands will deliver modern, efficient court facilities to serve the western suburbs of Brisbane and, of course, the Ipswich region. There will be two Magistrate's Courts and chambers, mediation facilities, two holding cells and better amenities for the public. Like Mackay, it will include closed circuit TV facilities. The site at Richlands is large enough for future expansion and within easy reach of public transport. Bus routes that service Inala, Forest Lake and the Darra and Wacol railway stations are within 200 metres of the location.

We have also begun construction of a \$1.1 million project to refurbish the Cooktown Court House. Its colonial architecture includes construction of a new, larger courtroom, interview rooms and chambers for the judge as well as other staff, special facilities for domestic violence victims, and disabled access as in the other courts. We expect that project will be finished by September next year.

**Mr SHINE:** On capital works, can you advise of any work being done with respect to improving facilities for juries.

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes. The Chief Justice raised with me after I became Attorney-General what he considered to be some concerns with the adequacy of the jury facilities, particularly in the Brisbane higher courts. Juries, of course, play a vital part in the delivery of our justice system. People give up their time to participate in the justice system as jurors. They should be able to hear the evidence and deliberate in reasonable comfort. That is why we are modernising those courts that need to provide better facilities for their jurors.

The majority of jury trials, of course, are held in Brisbane and that is where our focus has been. We have spent \$100,000 on better facilities in the higher courts over the past 12 months. Renovations have included repainting, new furniture, improved lighting, resheeting of the walls and replacing the floor coverings, some of which were only lino and now have carpet. In addition, a number of Australian bush scene prints have been hung in the jury rooms. So we are making the amenity of these jury rooms more comfortable for jurors.

We have also carried out renovations in our courthouses at Emerald, Hughenden, Charleville and Maryborough. In Emerald we have installed window screens in the jury room to ensure that

the jurors have sufficient privacy. In Hughenden we have installed some new handrails and a platform at each end of the jury stand. In Charleville the jury stand has been modified so that the jury have a clearer view of the proceedings in the courtroom and we have upholstered the seats. In Maryborough we have installed new padded backs on the chairs, which were timber backs previously, I think. In the next 12 months more work will be done to improve the conditions for jurors there.

Of course, the renovation at the Hervey Bay Court House will create a new jury room along with a new courtroom. Similarly in Mackay. These works are all part of our ongoing commitment to provide a modern justice system and ensure that jurors are able to participate in that with the minimum of disruption.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You may be forgiven for thinking that I am somewhat fixated and intrigued by the magistracy in Queensland.

**Mr WELFORD:** Obsessed, perhaps.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** A lot of other people are watching, too. It is a little bit like a soapie. I take you back to the answer that you gave to a question before regarding an application that you have to the Supreme Court, as I understand it, for the removal of a magistrate. You indicated, as I recollect, that this magistrate did not appear to have a great problem with that or any opposition, or whatever. I was sitting here mulling it over. My simple question is: if you are seeking removal and he does not seem to be opposed to it, why does he not just resign? Is there any benefit or disbenefit in resigning or not resigning? You are more or less walking the same way.

**Mr WELFORD:** I cannot answer that, to be perfectly honest. I spoke to the magistrate some time ago. At that stage, there were complications in relation to private insurance cover that he had for himself. I indicated that I would allow some time for him to try to resolve those matters so that if he retired he could receive that private insurance claim but that I could not allow the matter to drift for any length of time. The end result was that, as I understand it, he was not able to resolve that matter as promptly as he had hoped in order to resign voluntarily. So I instituted proceedings to bring the matter to a conclusion.

I think since that time some indication has been received that he may have resolved the issues with his private insurer, the point being that if he had not resolved those issues then it was necessary for me to terminate him and, in the course of that termination, make findings that would presumably also resolve his private insurance claim. I cannot give you any more detail than that. The reasons for him not resigning are matters for him and, of course, as I am sure you acknowledge, I cannot force a person to resign. But it is clear that the unfortunate accident that he suffered has made it difficult for him to perform his job and it was appropriate for me to make the application.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I suppose it is not appropriate for you to inform the committee of the identity of that magistrate?

**Mr WELFORD:** I think that has been made public. It is Magistrate Dillon who has been on sick leave for some time. I must say that the brief discussions that I have had with him have been perfectly cordial. He has sought to deal with his difficulties quite reasonably. But, as I indicated to him, when it reached a time that I thought that I could no longer justify him being paid for not working, I brought an application. How that application is resolved is a matter between him and the Crown Solicitor, who obviously acts on my behalf, and I have not been involved in recent negotiations between respective legal representatives. That is the only reason that I cannot give you an absolutely up-to-date state of the play. But it may be that if he does now resign before those proceedings are finalised, then the proceedings will lapse.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** My next question relates to the statement of financial performance for the Public Trust Office. It points to a \$1.1 million shortfall in output revenue from \$41,356,000 to \$40 million.

**Mr WELFORD:** Have you a reference there?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Yes, it is in the department's financial statements. It is on the first page of that for the Public Trust Office. But anyway, there is a shortfall, and the explanatory notes says that this is due mainly to forecast revenue from new investment products not being realised. What are the new investment products referred to?

**Mr WELFORD:** I will just take advice, if I may.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I think it was 3-14, and then there is an explanatory note after that—wherever they put the explanatory notes—which is—

**Mr WELFORD:** No, I do not think it is 3-14. We will just go back.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Certainly the output revenue is 3-14 and the explanatory note that follows that, note 1, as I understand it, indicates that this is mainly due to forecast revenue from new investment products not being realised. That is on page 3-20, statement of financial performance.

**Mr WELFORD:** Yes, okay. Sorry, you are right, 3-14. It is the \$1 million reduction in output revenue. I can give further clarification on notice, but by way of preliminary explanation, I was briefed by the Public Trustee last year about a proposal for the Public Trustee to provide services to community organisations that wanted to aggregate their public fundraising efforts. You would be aware, for example, that former Premier Mike Ahern is involved with the Queensland Foundation, which is doing a lot of very good fundraising for community groups. The idea is that the Public Trustee is contemplating a way in which the Public Trustee can be the investment manager for a major aggregated fundraising effort for nonprofit community organisations. That is still in development. I suspect that there was some anticipation 12 months or so ago that they might actually start to generate business at a faster rate than they in fact have.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So that is nonprofit community organisations only, not revenue streams associated with, say, amounts of money that private individuals may have or—

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not think so. Revenue streams from individuals currently served by the trust office are dealt with through an investment board and investments through the Queensland Investment Corporation. The QIC manages the investments of all the funds held by the Public Trustee on behalf of Public Trust Office clients at present. These new products were the potential, and still are the potential, for a small stream of management fees to flow from managing investments on behalf of funds raised for non-profit community organisations. If there is any further correction on that I will certainly come back to you, but you can take that as my preliminary view about the correct answer.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I believe in its search for revenue streams the Public Trust Office commissioned what has subsequently been known as the Panopera report. Would you indicate to the committee the cost of commissioning that report? I think it deals with these types of matters of investment.

**Mr WELFORD:** About \$250,000. It was a comprehensive report into the operation of and opportunities for the Public Trust Office.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Did this report enjoy the support of the Public Trust Office and the Queensland Investment Corporation? Was this report ever implemented?

**Mr WELFORD:** I will hand over to the Acting Public Trustee.

**Mr Wedge:** The Panopera report has been developed into what we commonly refer to now as the financial services project. It is looking at the ways in which we can secure further income by implementing some of what was referred to as the Panopera report.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Which parts of the Panopera report were actually implemented?

**Mr Wedge:** One of the ideas is about looking at alternative services that we can provide. One of them is as an adjunct to the free will-making service—that we assist those clients in their financial planning to ensure that, rather than just making a will or a power of attorney, we are giving them the opportunity to look at their whole-of-life situation insofar as their finances are concerned.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Is it true that the Panopera report, in conjunction with the QIC, actually indicated that in the first year of operation in this innovative new area of investment—sort of basically a managed investment fund—they would be dealing with maybe \$2.7 million, \$18 million in the second year, \$41 million in the third year, \$66 million in the fourth year and \$93 million in the fifth year?

**Mr WELFORD:** In any report like that where you develop a business plan you put in a projected cash flow. That is merely a projected cash flow of the potential for the business if it gets up and running.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** This report was commissioned by the Public Trust Office and Panopera did it. As I understand it, not too much of it has actually been implemented, notwithstanding an expenditure of \$250,000. An internal process of funds management by the Public Trust Office was basically concluded by the Public Trust Office. Are you aware of the probity issues with regard to what the Auditor-General raised a couple of years ago in relation to this new selection criteria and so on for these investment streams? There is a relationship, as I understand it.

**Mr WELFORD:** I agree with you that it is important that any work of the Public Trustee and any new areas of business that he contemplates are done in a way that accords with the financial accountability requirements of the Financial Administration and Audit Act of the state, which of course is scrutinised through the office of the Auditor-General. My understanding is that the Public Trustee, who himself is currently on leave, has been liaising closely with the Auditor-General to ensure that any steps taken by the Public Trustee are consistent with whole-of-government requirements.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I assume that the 2001-02 report is the final report we have.

**Mr WELFORD:** Of the Auditor-General?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Of the Queensland Audit Office. Is it true that ABN AMRO Morgans now manages these funds, which were envisaged to have been managed in a different way by the Panopera report?

**Mr WELFORD:** If clients come in now, those clients are referred to Morgans. If those clients take up financial plans through Morgans, then the Public Trustee receives a commission.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** What is the extent of that particular commission or the earnings which the Public Trustee has actually made as a consequence of this arrangement with Morgans?

**Mr WELFORD:** We do not have those figures to hand. We will provide them to the committee before the end of the week. Suffice to say, they are not large amounts because obviously, with the downturn of the market, there has not been a huge take-up of these initiatives.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Would it be right to conclude, on preliminary figures, that it may be in the vicinity of \$4,000?

**Mr WELFORD:** No idea, but that is exactly what we can get back to you about.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I refer to the internal process the Public Trust Office went through following the commissioning of the Panopera report. It basically felt that it could do something a bit different and a bit better. There were problems found with the process by the Auditor-General. Why was it that the Public Trust Office felt that it could basically go and do it better?

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not think it is a case of the Public Trust Office purporting to do anything better in particular. I think the Public Trustee has quite rightly taken the initiative to explore ways in which the Public Trust Office can expand its service and expand its capacity to grow its business. It is, in a sense, semi-independent and commercial in its operations. The more revenue it can earn from income generating activity, the more it can do for its clients who are impecunious—who are, after all, the whole point and purpose of the Public Trust Office. It is there, primarily and foremost, to serve those people who are least well off, who are incapacitated or disabled, who do not have legal capacity to manage their own affairs and who need the protection of the safety net of the Public Trustee's office.

While one can quibble about the costs of the report, the fact is that the report was commissioned simply to explore ways in which there might be new avenues of business for the Public Trustee to seek to generate additional income. Obviously the Public Trustee has quite rightly taken that report and, before seeking to implement any measures that might have been suggested, gone to the Auditor-General to check what measures would be consistent with the financial accountability requirements of the Auditor-General and the law. That has meant that there has not been any huge revenue generated at this stage, but that does not mean that all opportunities have been exhausted.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I have no problem with regard to the Public Trust Office in Queensland investing its clients' money in the most appropriate way. That is not the issue. The issue is process and the issue is the report which was commissioned, which was fairly extensive. I am not convinced that too much of that at all, if anything, was actually implemented. Problems were identified by the Auditor-General. He made comments such as, 'In addition, by not obtaining tenders through a public advertisement for such a significant contract the Public Trust Office could be criticised for not ensuring that all potential suppliers had been given the opportunity to submit an offer.' There are other issues there.

**Mr WELFORD:** You mean the process for commissioning the Panopera report?

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** The Panopera report was by and large ignored. It put in place a process using the Public Trust and, as I understand it—

**Mr WELFORD:** And private financial advisers.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** And then the Public Trust Office decided that it would go and do it itself, more or less. Also it says here that there was no documentation available to audit to establish that adequate research had been undertaken to identify potential suppliers. What has been done, basically, to fix those issues?

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

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I refer to the participation of indigenous people in the administration of justice which is mentioned on page 1-4 of the MPS. Could you please advise the committee what impact this training program is having?

**Mr WELFORD:** The training program for indigenous communities involved as JPs is making a remarkable difference in those indigenous communities. It began in 1998. Since then we have trained more than 140 indigenous justices of the peace. This has happened in places such as Badu Island, Bamaga, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Thursday Island, Woorabinda, Wujal Wujal and Yarrabah. Community members from the Aboriginal communities of Aurukun, Old Mapoon and Napranum have also recently completed the training and will shortly be appointed as justices of the peace in the Magistrates Court qualification.

Feedback about the program is extremely positive. It has certainly made a difference in a number of the communities in which it is operating. Those justices of the peace are participating in the community justice groups in those communities. Elders at Cherbourg and Murray Island have also recently approached the JP training unit in our department to see whether they can participate in the next round of training. It is giving people in these indigenous communities not only much greater access to justice but also greater knowledge and understanding of how the justice system operates. Knowledge is of course being retained and shared in these local communities. In that way, the communities themselves are empowered to resolve many issues in their communities, having a better understanding of the boundaries of right and wrong and the boundaries of what is acceptable according to the law and what is not.

Once a person is appointed as a JP he or she can then effectively convene a local Magistrates Court. A minimum of two but preferably three JPs are required to constitute the court in this way. They can deal with simple offences, local by-law breaches and some domestic violence matters. They obviously provide an opportunity for respected community leaders and elders to have input into sentencing.

Language barriers are also overcome by enabling the communities in this way to manage some of their own justice issues. Palm Island is a good example of how the process works. I recently visited Palm Island. The trainer from the JPs branch in the department conducted training there over two weeks late last year and early this year. As a result, 16 participants were sworn in when I visited the island in May this year. These JPs are already actively involved in their community, providing procedural advice and witnessing documents for community members. The first court is likely to be convened in the near future.

**Mr LEE:** I refer you to page 1-19 of the MPS and the reference to the Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit. Could you provide some details of this unit and the impact it will have on serious criminal activity?

**Mr WELFORD:** The Criminal Assets Confiscation Unit in the office of the DPP was established in January this year as part of our government's commitment to tackle organised crime, particularly large scale drug trafficking, and to seize the illicit proceeds of that activity. It followed the introduction of the government's Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002, which established a new civil confiscation scheme and strengthened the existing conviction based scheme.

The new civil scheme has given law enforcement agencies an important new tool to use against drug syndicates and organised crime bosses. It places the onus on suspected criminals to prove that cash and property acquired by them in large amounts has been obtained illegally and is not the proceeds of criminal activity.

The scheme applies to all indictable offences punishable by five years imprisonment or more and to any offences prescribed by regulation. Proof under the scheme is only required to the civil standard that a person has been involved in serious criminal activity during the past six years. Once that is established, the onus shifts to the person concerned to remove any lawfully obtained property from the operations of the scheme by showing that it was not illegally acquired.

Applications to seize assets have been based on solid evidence about serious criminal activity and are brought by the DPP before the Supreme Court. Since the Criminal Assets

Confiscation Unit was established, it has successfully obtained nine restraining orders under the civil scheme in respect of people who have been charged but not yet convicted. A further two restraining orders have been obtained in proceedings brought under the old act and transferred under the application of the new act.

Assets worth about \$7.4 million are the subject of forfeiture applications that are yet to be decided. A total amount of about \$8.44 million has been frozen by 11 orders in total, but two of these were under the old scheme. The community as a whole benefits from the operation of the Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act. It is designed to deprive criminals of the fruits of their criminal activity and thereby discourage reoffending in that way. Undermining the profits of organised and other serious crime is an effective adjunct to our crime reduction strategies.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Attorney-General. I refer you to page 5-3 of the MPS and the reference to Legal Aid Queensland's partnership with preferred suppliers. Could you outline some of the programs that are being undertaken to help disadvantaged Queenslanders gain access to justice?

**Mr WELFORD:** In the last financial year 332 preferred suppliers worked in partnership with Legal Aid Queensland to deliver legal aid services to the Queensland community. These 'preferred suppliers' are members of the legal community who have entered into a three-year agreement with Legal Aid to provide legal services. Other legal service providers employed by Legal Aid include remote service providers. These are firms who practice in remote areas of Queensland and have agreed to perform services on behalf of legally aided clients. There are currently 22 remote suppliers, and 20 have entered into service agreements with Legal Aid.

Legal Aid also works in partnership with community legal centres to help meet the legal needs of Queenslanders. The special skills and expertise of the community legal centres complement Legal Aid services and make them a key component of our legal system. Community legal centres can also provide a flexible approach to individual legal issues and encourage non-litigious dispute resolution mechanisms. Legal Aid Queensland has also developed relationships with law firms in Queensland who, as members of the Queensland Public Interest Law Clearing House, provide pro bono legal assistance to disadvantaged Queenslanders.

QPILCH, as it is known, is a partnership between Legal Aid Queensland, community legal centres, private law firms, the Queensland Law Society, the Bar Association and Griffith University. All of these groups are working together with the same goal of helping Queenslanders access legal representation. It also bridges the gap between those who can afford private legal services and those who cannot access legal aid. If a person has a legal problem and cannot afford a private lawyer but is ineligible for legal aid, they can be referred to QPILCH or approach QPILCH directly for assistance. Of course, cases that are taken pro bono must be in the public interest—that is, they must be cases which by their nature have the potential for broader impacts on other people, such as disadvantaged groups, or raise matters of public concern.

Another significant initiative by QPILCH has been its homeless persons legal clinic. Volunteer solicitors from QPILCH member firms give pro bono legal advice to some of the most disadvantaged Queenslanders—the homeless—at clinics located at a number of Brisbane welfare agencies.

**Mr SHINE:** I also refer to page 5-3 of the MPS and the reference to Legal Aid Queensland's roll-out of its telephone legal advice service. Could you explain what its availability is and what benefits are involved?

**Mr WELFORD:** The telephone legal advice service has been a great initiative of Legal Aid Queensland and certainly a benefit to people living in rural and regional areas. It means Queenslanders now have easy access to legal advice irrespective of their geographic location simply for the cost of a phone call. It is an easy service to access, no matter where you live. In 2001-02 more than 250,000 Queenslanders called Legal Aid's 1300 number for assistance.

A client information officer takes the call from the 1300 number. Client information officers are well trained. In fact, many are currently studying law or other disciplines and have been able to provide clients with generally available legal information. They have access to a comprehensive legal database to provide this information and it is updated on a daily basis.

Client information officers help callers identify the most appropriate options for resolving their issue—some of which do not necessarily require legal action—and also refer people to other agencies that can more appropriately address the problems involved. If legal advice is needed, particulars are taken and a solicitor is tasked to telephone back and provide the advice.

Feedback so far has been very positive, particularly from those who have difficulty accessing office services of the Legal Aid Office, such as women with child care responsibilities or people with disabilities. In a recent survey clients of the Legal Aid telephone advice service who had received legal advice over the phone had a similar or higher satisfaction level than those who had received advice face to face. There are also advantages to the Legal Aid Office. It is a major strategy for managing the high demand for legal advice. It typically takes less time than face-to-face advice, thus allowing advice to be given to more people. It can also be delivered at less cost than face-to-face legal advice.

In the last financial year telephone legal advice has accounted for about 30 per cent of all legal advice provided by Legal Aid. Utilising this and other technology, such as video conferencing and web advice, Legal Aid Queensland is able to provide more advice to people in rural and remote locations.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Attorney, I refer you to page 1-12 of the MPS and the reference to the use of expanded e-technology in higher courts. Could you outline what is planned and provide the committee with an understanding of the benefits?

**Mr WELFORD:** The higher courts technology project commenced before I became the Attorney-General. It is now in its fourth year and its aim is to make our courts more efficient. Over the past 12 months a number of new online services have been progressively developed. These include e-searching, e-listing, e-chambers and an early version of an electronic courtroom or e-courtroom.

These four new web based services have been introduced to the principal registries in Brisbane, Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville. E-searching allows anyone to search court civil files over the Internet on a 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week basis. The service is provided free of charge and has been very successful, with approximately 400 searches a day now being conducted by this method. E-listings provides access to the court calendar and allows parties to request trial dates electronically instead of lodging forms over a counter.

E-chambers allows parties to make interlocutory applications to judges via the Internet, rather than attending in person. It also enables parties to post submissions, draft orders and other documents into a security online bulletin board that is only accessible by the court and the parties involved in the case. E-chambers also provides a more flexible and efficient solution to the existing process of attending the court for chamber applications.

E-courtroom enables appropriate cases to be fully supported by access to electronic documents during a courtroom trial and displaying those documents in electronic form, and for real-time transcript and web based legal research.

Over the next 12 months there will be further work done on the feasibility of upgrading the civil case management system with a view to taking more business online. This will provide clients, litigants and their legal representatives with 24-hour access to their files and will also lay a foundation for the future implementation of electronic filing of court documents. We are also extending the four existing e-court services to the District Courts at Southport and Maroochydore.

E-searching is a particularly good example of Smart State technology. Figures indicate that at least 40 per cent of manual registry searches are now conducted online and most of these are taking place outside normal registry opening hours. These developments are providing greater access to justice for legal practitioners and their clients and to the general public, who no longer have to physically attend a courthouse to transact business. It is also making our courts more efficient by reducing the overall cost and time involved in transacting litigation.

**Mr LEE:** I refer the Attorney-General to page 1-15 of the MPS relating to the timeliness of the higher courts. It appears that our courts are performing well, but could the Attorney-General advise the committee how we compare to other jurisdictions and how the courts use of circuiting helps manage the case load?

**Mr WELFORD:** Our Queensland courts are performing well compared to other states. On the figures, at least, our courts appear to be the most efficient and cost effective in Australia. That is the result evident from the Commonwealth's *Report on Government Services 2003*. The report provides an annual comparison of the performance of courts across the country, and it is an important barometer in judging their effectiveness.

The rate at which our higher courts—for example, the Court of Appeal, Supreme Courts and District Courts—are finalising criminal cases is better than any other jurisdiction in Australia. Our

Magistrate's Courts are also well ahead of the national averages for clearing both criminal and civil cases. This sort of performance is the cornerstone of an effective justice system.

Let me give you a snapshot of some of the information in the Commonwealth report. It shows that the Queensland Supreme Court achieved a 78 per cent rate for finalising criminal matters within six months—well ahead of the national average of 67 per cent. The District Court exceeded all other states and territories with 80 per cent of criminal matters finalised in less than six months—up by six per cent on the previous year and higher than the national average of 73 per cent. In the state's Magistrate's Courts, 94 per cent of criminal matters were completed within six months, exceeding the nation's average of 91, while 95 per cent of civil matters were finalised in less than 12 months compared to 93 per cent for the nation.

The Queensland Court of Appeal also was well ahead of the nation's average, finalising 98 per cent of criminal matters in less than 12 months compared to an 82 per cent average for courts of appeal in other jurisdictions. It is essential that our court system maintains our high standards which underpin public confidence in the institutions of the law, and I think that with the advent of the electronic courtroom, our improvements for vulnerable witnesses and the new magistrates complex in Brisbane our court system will continue to improve at a higher level.

**The CHAIR:** The time for government questions has expired. I now call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Earlier I raised some issues regarding this investment strategy of Public Trust Queensland. I know that the Attorney is getting some information. If you recollect, my question basically related to the report that was commissioned. It cost about \$250,000. As I understand it, what it basically indicated should be adopted was that the Public Trust Queensland would be the go-between. It would get the investment pool of money and that would then go to the Queensland Investment Corporation, as I understand it. This was based on the assumption of investment with QIC. PTQ had a process, which has been criticised by the Queensland Audit Office, of not following state purchasing policy, basically designing an in-house system, and went to ABN Morgans. It would be the investment manager. My question is: why was this process decided on? What has been done to actually address the concerns that were raised by the Auditor-General?

**Mr WELFORD:** I will let the Acting Public Trustee respond to that.

**Mr Wedge:** The Panopera report was not discarded. It may have been adapted since the commissioning of the report to meet the changing circumstances. With regard to the Auditor-General's comments, it is my understanding that there was one question that was raised about the process that had been involved when Morgans was selected. It queried a particular clause in the expression of interest that was put out about the ability to negotiate other terms and conditions. If that is the report that you are referring to, what I can say in respect of that is that that matter having been drawn to the public trustee's attention we made some investigations to find out that it was there. It would not have been the normal practice. We have now taken steps to make sure that that clause does not get included in any expressions of interest again.

When Morgans was selected three organisations were contacted to participate in the project. It was from that process that Morgans was ultimately selected to undertake the project. It is presently being developed. It is not fully implemented yet. You drew attention to those figures which were fairly high. As the Attorney said before, the figures are fairly low at the moment due to the circumstances. At the Public Trust Office we are going through a process at the moment to identify what decisions have been made and where we should go to in the future.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** There are a number of issues. One was the invitation to tender provisions. There were a couple of clauses which were raised by the Auditor. Another issue was the truncation of the process of calling for the tenders. Some concerns were expressed with regards to the dates as I recollect it. The invitation to tender was 1 October 2001 and submissions were to be lodged by 5.00 p.m. on Monday, 12 October 2001. There were some concerns there as well with regards to the inability of some tenderers to be able to meet that time frame and basically how it had been concluded that Morgans was the preferred tender. My issue is this. Is it true that Panopera envisaged that QIC would be handling the funds; that assumptions were based on QIC being the place where the funds were going to be invested?

**Mr Wedge:** QIC is the manager of our funds. QIC would not necessarily manage the funds relating to investments with Morgans because these are people who would be making the wills with the Public Trust Office who would then go off to Morgans. If there is a financial planning requirement for those individuals, they would enter into a contract with Morgans about their

financial planning. Morgans would then decide how that plan should be implemented, and they would make investments. Whether that would be with the public trustee investment funds or with some other funds, that is a matter for them. That would not be a matter for the public trustee to decide.

**Mr WELFORD:** I might be able to assist in that regard. I have not read the Panopera report personally, and it may be that the Panopera report contemplated that the QIC would have some role. Clearly the QIC does not act as either financial adviser or investor for private individuals. If the Panopera report contemplated that when individuals with whom the Office of the Public Trustee were already dealing over a will or something wanted to invest funds separately, it was not open to the Public Trustee to invest their funds with the QIC or provide them with private financial planning advice. That is not the function of the Public Trustee. I think that is what the Public Trustee discovered when seeking to implement the Panopera report; that in order for them to simply take clients' other investment funds and invest it, they were in effect taking on the role of financial planner and that is not their role. That is why they sought to call expressions of interest from private financial planners to whom they could refer people. The Public Trustee would still generate a small revenue stream from that. The private financial planners whose role it is to give financial planning advice could then advise people of the range of options, including amongst them putting money back into the Public Trustee's investment bonds and so forth which the Public Trustee then puts to QIC. The option of the Public Trustee providing the initial financial planning advice and taking all the money and only putting it in the QIC I suggest would not be appropriate for the Public Trustee and would also attract criticism from the Auditor-General.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Further with regard to this matter, have you been able to find out in the intervening period of time, and I know it has probably been short, the amount of money that was actually returned? I understood it was around about \$4,000. The other question further to this is what has been done by PTQ to address the deficiencies which were identified by the Queensland Audit Office? Have all these matters been addressed because there are concerns about the state purchasing policy. There were also concerns about the clauses which were written into the tender offer document and basically the time frames involved and those sorts of things. Have they have all been addressed?

**Mr WELFORD:** In relation to the revenue generated, that information is currently being sought. If we are able to get it relayed back here before the end of the proceedings I will certainly put it on the record for you.

In relation to steps taken by the Public Trustee to respond to the issues raised by the Auditor-General, I am happy for the Acting Public Trustee to give you an account of that. The Public Trustee, of course, is the accountable officer. I expect accountable officers in that position to be accountable to the estimates committee for responses to any Auditor-General's report. I will allow the acting Public Trustee to respond.

**Mr Wedge:** My understanding is that all the issues with the Auditor-General have been cleared away with the Auditor-General. I have mentioned before we have undertaken to not put those sort of clauses in future expressions of interest. To the best of my knowledge all the issues with the Auditor-General have been dealt with to the Auditor-General's satisfaction.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Finally, notwithstanding the expenditure of \$250,000 on this Panopera report, you believe that you got value for money out of the report even though you basically designed an in-house system to meet some objectives. Which particular parts of it do you consider were useful in guiding the Public Trust Office in going towards this process of new ways of raising a revenue stream and investing clients' monies?

**Mr Wedge:** The Panopera report gave the Public Trustee the opportunity to move into new areas. It was able to recognise that with the changing society, with people having more disposable assets, that there was a need for a more modern approach to estate planning et cetera. There were some things in there that whilst the organisation may have chosen not to adopt, their knowledge of those options are very beneficial to the organisation. For example, there was a proposal for a call centre to be put in place so that people could be called at home about these new products. It was decided that that would not be appropriate at the time. It may in the future be appropriate to take those sorts of actions. There are a number of those issues which are now on the table and the Public Trustee can use that report as the basis for ongoing deliberations about how it can best serve its clients.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** To the Attorney I direct a question regarding legal professional reform regulation et cetera in Queensland. You mentioned earlier on that this would be funded by

interest on trust accounts. I note in the MPS that there is no indication of a figure which will be required to fund this, and you know that over a long period of time there have been concerns about the interest on trust accounts. Of course, a lot of that funds legal aid. We know that. Is that going to be compromised in any way? What do you envisage the cost of this new regulatory compliance regime is going to be?

**Mr WELFORD:** As you say, the interest on trust accounts, under the current Queensland Law Society Act, is allocated to various functions. It is allocated to the Law Society for distribution amongst a series of measures, part of which is the regulatory or complaints handling arrangements. There is also provision for a grants committee. Grants are handed out. Of course, the act also provides for a portion to be allocated to legal aid. I do not anticipate that there will be any difficulties funding the new office out of the trust account revenue. Funding will still go to legal aid. There will be no major reductions in funding to legal aid other than occurs with the fluctuations in the amount of revenue that comes from interest on trust accounts. It is interesting to note that that revenue is down a little bit this year, which I discovered as an outcome of the estimates process.

In terms of the cost of operating the new arrangements, we are still developing that in terms of the office of the legal service commissioner. I have indicated publicly what the staffing complement will be for the new office. I think we are looking at between \$1 million and \$2 million. It is a relatively modest figure given that the overall take from interest on trust accounts is around \$18 million to \$20 million a year. To give you a bit of an idea of how that is split up, some of it goes to the Supreme Court Library. For example, between about \$1 million and \$1.5 million will go to the Supreme Court Library. Some \$12 million per year will go to legal aid.

In the first year, because we are starting halfway through the year with the Legal Service Commissioner in about February next year, we do not anticipate that the Office of the Legal Service Commissioner will have a huge budget. But, as it grows, it will be between \$1 million and \$2 million, depending on the demand. Obviously, we need to look at it after the first year or two of operation.

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

**Mr WELFORD:** Mr Chairman, if I may with your indulgence, I am able to report in response to Mr Springborg's question about what revenue has been generated from that new proposal for clients to be referred to private financial advisers.

**The CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Mr WELFORD:** I do not have a figure for post 30 June this year, but for the period from the start of that operation until 30 June the total revenue generated was \$6,397.23.

**Mr SHINE:** In answer to an earlier question you referred to the performance of our courts. Could you give the committee an idea of how our higher courts deal with matters in regional areas of Queensland?

**Mr WELFORD:** As the committee is aware, there are courthouses in many regional areas of Queensland. In all these centres there are regular sittings of the Magistrates Court. Not all of these centres have sittings of the higher courts, that is, the District and Supreme courts. The District Court has resident judges in Brisbane, Townsville, Rockhampton, Southport, Cairns, Maroochydore, Ipswich and Beenleigh. There are also 34 regional centres to which the District Court travels on circuit during the year. The Supreme Court has resident judges in Brisbane, Cairns, Townsville and Rockhampton. The Supreme Court also circuits to seven regional centres—Bundaberg, Longreach, Mackay, Maryborough, Mount Isa, Roma and Toowoomba. There is naturally a cost involved in providing these circuits, but at the same time there is a benefit to these regional communities—both victims and witnesses do not have to travel long distances to court.

I might mention in passing that there has been a suggestion that the Supreme Court might also circuit to the Gold Coast. At this stage, I suspect that is difficult to justify given the current workload, although there are some practitioners on the coast who think the workload is sufficient to justify a circuit to the Gold Coast. I have asked my department to have a look at that and the Chief Justice will exercise his own judgment in relation to that. But by way of example I point out that in the 2002 calendar year in the criminal jurisdiction only about 12 per cent of the 492 new criminal matters committed to the Brisbane Supreme Court were committed from Southport and in the civil jurisdiction only 10 per cent of the Brisbane Supreme Court civil matters emanated from the Gold Coast. I think the suggestion has been made primarily in response to the hearing of criminal matters. But we will keep it under consideration and see how the demand for the service

develops over the next year or so. Ultimately, of course, the decision would be made by the Chief Justice in consultation with me and having regard to the level of demand that would justify a circuit on the Gold Coast.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I refer you to page 1-11 of the MPS and the reference to an electronic facility. Could you please explain how this facility works, where it is available and what benefits it provides?

**Mr WELFORD:** As I mentioned before, when we get it fully operational, e-lodgment would make our courts more accessible to lawyers especially but also to local governments and other professionals. It also makes the court process more efficient by enabling parties to proceedings to lodge their civil claims or request judgments. E-lodgment is based on CITEC's legal information system called Confirm. This currently covers small claims, minor debt claims and requests for default judgment. The service provides extended processing hours, with access to the civil registry system available from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. on weekdays, including public holidays. Currently, electronic lodgment is available at 16 courts for this limited jurisdiction. These courts are Beenleigh, Brisbane, Bundaberg, Caboolture, Cairns, Gladstone, Gympie, Holland Park, Inala, Ipswich, Mackay, Maroochydore, Rockhampton, Southport, Toowoomba and Townsville. These courts process well over 50 per cent of the civil matters across the state. Later in the year we hope to connect three additional courts to the civil registry system—Cleveland, Noosa and Petrie.

E-lodgment also provides benefits to the courts. From the courts' perspective, it saves time processing and handling physical documents, it reduces backlogs in document processing, it reduces the amount of time spent putting data into the civil registry system, and it reduces the number of financial transactions by having a central collection of filing fees for all electronic lodgments. From the clients' perspective, they do not have to travel to the court and there is a reduction in the number of documents they have to mail or lodge personally over the counter. Waiting times are reduced and they can, of course, transact business outside normal office hours. It is a good example of how technology enables us to deliver justice in a way that is more convenient to users and more cost effective for the system as a whole.

**Mr LEE:** I refer the Attorney to page 1-13 of the MPS and the reference to alternative dispute resolution. Could the Attorney outline the availability of this service both through the courts and also to everyday Queenslanders?

**Mr WELFORD:** The ADR branch of my department is a very active branch. I am very proud of the work it does. It is always looking for ways in which it can contribute to more peaceful communities by resolving disputes through mediation. It has been operating since 1990. In the early nineties, ADR centres, or community justice centres as they were then called, operated out of south-east Queensland and subsequently out of Cairns, Rockhampton and Townsville. Two more centres at Wide Bay and Mackay were opened in the late nineties to serve growing demand in those areas. ADR is popular because it not only helps people avoid court action but it saves time and money. When it first began, the focus of the ADR service was community based disputes—disputes over fence lines, neighbourhood disputes, such as arguments over noise, tearing down trees and noisy pets. Nowadays, the service has expanded to a wide range of civil disputes—some family matters that would otherwise need to go to the Family Court, some mining and resources matters, for example, and public interest environmental dispute resolution to some extent. Workplace issues and court ordered mediation are also now starting to be provided by the ADR team.

In the past financial year, 1,800 mediations and facilitations were conducted. Between 80 per cent and 90 per cent of these non-court mediations reached agreement. So there is potentially a significant reduction in the number of matters that would otherwise be more expensively dealt with in court. Relationships have been developed with the Land and Resources Tribunal, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, Q-Comp, or workers compensation, and the Commissioner of Body Corporate and Community Management—all areas that are ripe for alternative dispute mediation.

The ADR branch is also providing services currently to the defence forces in Queensland—not internationally, I might say; Mr Howard is making a good mess of that—and is looking at ways of developing a more comprehensive partnership with the Commonwealth department. Importantly, work is being done on potential partnerships with schools—conflict management skill development for young people and mediation services.

Another form of dispute resolution being offered is called abbreviated mediation. This is a program that offers clients of the Small Claims Tribunals and minor debts courts an opportunity to

resolve their disputes before appearing before a magistrate or a referee. This program has proved popular with court staff and members of the magistracy since its inception and has spread quickly throughout our magistrates courts.

**The CHAIR:** I take you to page 5-4 of the MPS and a reference to the regular legal advice clinics in rural, regional and remote areas of northern Queensland. Could you advise how these clinics operate and what benefits they provide?

**Mr WELFORD:** Legal Aid Queensland has been running free legal advice clinics in rural, regional and remote areas since December 2001. It is a new initiative. The need for this was identified in a report Legal Aid commissioned called the *Northern outreach report*. That report documented the legal needs of indigenous Queenslanders, particularly women, living in 18 communities across Cape York and the Gulf of Carpentaria. The report highlighted the need for Legal Aid Queensland to provide improved access to legal advisory services for people living in these communities, particularly in areas where a prolonged wet season can isolate towns for up to four months of the year. In response to this need, Legal Aid Queensland established its Cape and Gulf Outreach Service. The scheme involves solicitors undertaking regular circuits to remote indigenous communities to provide legal advice. It is run out of a service based in Legal Aid's Cairns and Townsville offices.

The officers travel to communities in remote locations with indigenous community liaison officers. This helps identify cultural and community factors that can impact on the delivery of legal services in those areas. They go either by four-wheel-drive or charter flight. Shared trips are undertaken, for example, to Lockhart River and other cape communities with other agencies of government, such as the Liquor Licensing Division of the department of tourism and fair trading. Advice clinics are currently held in 19 communities across the cape and on Thursday Island. The teams have so far given over 300 individual legal advices on a range of matters and opened more than 65 criminal injury compensation files. They have also established alliances with community elders, community groups, councils and the community justice groups to ensure the legal service is culturally appropriate and sustainable. This is building a network of legal support for these remote communities that enables them to function more effectively and with less conflict.

**Mr SHINE:** I refer again to the Public Trustee and page 3-8 of the MPS, which states that a focus of the Public Trustee Office is on providing assistance in the management of financial affairs to members of the community whose disabilities have placed them at a disadvantage. Could the Attorney explain how the Public Trustee is providing an increased level of support for those people?

**Mr WELFORD:** The Public Trustee Office of Queensland is the largest Public Trustee office in Australia. Some in other states have been sold off by non-Labor governments, but in Queensland we can be proud that the Public Trustee not only has a network of 15 regional offices serving regional and remote communities; it also provides advice to many people who otherwise are unable to obtain advice and is providing that advice free of charge. It was established initially to act in the capacity of administrator of deceased estates and to provide financial management of the funds of people with a disability and to give aid in legal proceedings for people who are disadvantaged.

As the committee is aware, these services are provided by the Public Trustee at no cost and that explains why the Public Trustee does explore other ways in which it can generate income which can then cross-subsidise the non-fee paying essential services that it provides. I am pleased to say the Public Trustee has had a major focus on improved customer service over the past few years. Currently, it helps over 5,000 adults with impaired capacity to administer their financial affairs. There are five disability service standards governing the services provided by the Public Trustee. The Public Trustee consults with the adult or important people in the adult's life to develop a 12-month plan. This ensures that the adult and his or her family take part in the decision-making process to reach an agreed plan of action. It also ensures the Public Trustee provides services that are tailored to each adult's individual needs.

The Public Trustee also oversees the development of basic budgeting or financial plans for adults with impaired capacity. These take into account budget, lifestyle and financial goals to ensure immediate and longer term financial needs are met. The plans are reviewed every 12 months to ensure they continue to meet each client's changing needs. This high level of service is given equally to all adults regardless of their ability to meet the cost of the support. Our government has approved a scheme of community service obligation subsidies to ensure services are provided to adults of limited means, regardless of their ability to pay. That community service

obligation accounted, in the last financial year, for about \$8.165 million in services provided by the Public Trustee to people with limited means.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the portfolio of Attorney-General and Minister for Justice has expired. I thank the Attorney-General and the portfolio officers for their attendance today. Before you leave, I remind you that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard web site in two hours.

Sitting suspended from 12.01 p.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Hon. S. Robertson, Minister for Natural Resources and Minister for Mines (Acting for Hon. M. F. Reynolds, Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland)

Ms F. McKersie, Director-General (Acting)

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

Mr J. Higgins, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

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

Ms M. Smith, Executive Director Business Support Services

Mr G. Taylor, Director Finance and Asset Services

Mr A. O'Brien, Executive Director Strategic and Executive Services (Acting)

Mr R. Johnson, Director Aviation, Counter Disaster and Rescue Services

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**The CHAIR:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The next portfolio to be examined is that of the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A 15-second warning will be given before the expiration of these time limits.

The sessional orders require that at least half the time is to be allotted to non-government members. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland open for examination. The question before the chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Chair, members of the committee, thank you very much. The Beattie government has again delivered on its commitment to the Department of Emergency Services. The 2003-04 budget of \$607.6 million represents a further increase of 8.8 per cent—an increase well in excess of CPI. By any standard, this is a good outcome and, compared to the last coalition budget, it represents a total increase of \$172.8 million over the last five years.

The Department of Emergency Services has developed into a more responsive, more efficient and more integrated organisation. In the first two years of the Beattie government we addressed the serious funding concerns being experienced by the Fire Service. With the introduction of the community ambulance cover, we have now established a solid and predictable funding base for the Queensland Ambulance Service.

The introduction of the community ambulance cover represents a new era for emergency services. For the first time in its history, the QAS can now develop future financial plans with much more confidence and certainty. With all Queenslanders now covered for ambulance services, many of the less fortunate in our society can also look forward to a better future.

I point out that preliminary reports show that there have been no noticeable increases in calls to 000 since 1 July. It is pleasing to see that people are using the Ambulance Service wisely at this stage of the new scheme. The introduction of the CAC is the latest example of the Beattie government's development of emergency services to meet today's needs. We have established the financial foundations for the emergency services of tomorrow.

For several years we have highlighted that the men and women we call on in times of crisis are the best in Australia and among the best in the world. The department's three operational divisions have now been recognised in the Australian Business Excellence Awards. These independent assessments are further endorsed by the 2003 report on government services and our own community surveys that consistently record satisfaction rates above 90 per cent. This is a

motivated organisation and this year's record budget will enable us to significantly enhance service delivery to all Queenslanders.

The 2003-04 budget provides many highlights and, apart from the record \$607.6 million budget, this budget delivers 110 additional paramedics—the largest increase in QAS numbers ever—and \$77.7 million in new capital acquisitions, a 53 per cent increase on the 2002-03 capital budget. These are changes of real significance and changes that will have a real impact throughout Queensland.

Over the next 12 months staff and volunteers in every community, in every station and every unit will see where improvements are being made. This budget strengthens the department's capacity to deliver more resources and more effective training to staff across the state. But it does more than that. It provides the capacity to target more at risk demographic groups and focus on other areas identified for special attention.

Our 2003-04 allocation will make major inroads into our fleet modernisation program, with 112 new urban and rural fire vehicles and trailers and 86 new ambulance vehicles. By the end of this financial year the Beattie government will have provided more than 600 new or refurbished ambulance vehicles and almost 600 new or refurbished fire units. This year \$5.6 million is provided to complete an \$8 million funding program to replace the Squirrel helicopter and additional funding for community helicopter providers.

The 52.8 per cent increase in our capital allocation will deliver four new ambulance stations, 17 replacement ambulance stations, seven replacement fire stations and fund significant upgrades of a further seven fire stations and provide a \$1.9 million joint emergency service complex in North Mackay. By the end of this financial year the Beattie government will have provided more than 100 new or replacement stations throughout Queensland.

For our 85,000 volunteers, ongoing support from our volunteer support package provides \$5.7 million to support a range of initiatives for our emergency service volunteers and volunteer organisations. This includes an additional \$1 million to further support SES volunteers, Surf Life Saving and volunteer marine rescue organisations. This year's record budget also ensures that training programs and standards continue to be developed and extended to staff and volunteers throughout the state. Some \$3.4 million is provided to strengthen the state's counter-terrorism response capability. More joint emergency service training courses will be conducted and our technical rescue capability receives a boost through the acquisition of additional specialist equipment.

In support of this additional funding, we now have one of the best emergency training facilities in the Southern Hemisphere at Whyte Island. That facility is now producing trained staff who have experienced realistic scenarios, using state-of-the-art equipment in one of the best and safest training environments available.

Under the Beattie government the foundation stones for the agency are being strengthened by clear and consistent direction in our development. Significant changes are being made and these changes are being embraced, and in fact extended, by our partnership arrangements with staff, volunteers, unions and stakeholders. I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my opening remarks in *Hansard*.

Across the agency we have done much more to involve and include the community and stakeholders in our development.

This government has passed legislation increasing the number of representatives on the minister's Emergency Services Advisory Council.

We have developed and strengthened our Community Safety Programs and have consciously targeted at risk groups and communities that have been left behind.

The 2003-04 budget guarantees ongoing development and expansion of these initiatives.

The department has made a long-term commitment to working with Indigenous Australians.

This budget provides the second year funding for our Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Package—a \$2.1 million commitment over four years to achieve safer and more supportive communities.

It provides the foundation for this department to engage with Indigenous Australian communities in the development of flexible models of service delivery, create additional training and employment opportunities and assist communities with capacity building.

Complementing our Indigenous employment strategy, our local support networks, the DG's involvement in the Community Champion program, extension of our cadet programs and our newly established partnerships with other agencies, are all having a positive impact.

Collectively we are committed to an effective, dedicated and professional emergency services organisation.

We are no longer focused on the maintenance of service standards but on building and developing new standards that rival or surpass national and international benchmarks.

In conclusion, the Beattie government has delivered emergency services for all Queenslanders regardless of their economic or social circumstances and no matter where they live within this state.

These are real achievements the Beattie government is proud of and this record appropriation for emergency services of \$607.6 million will build upon these strengths for the future.

I close by wishing the Minister for Emergency Services, Mike Reynolds, all the best. I spoke to Mike this morning. He is recovering well. Despite doctors orders, I am sure he will be listening to us currently. I know all members of this committee would join me in wishing Mike well in his recovery.

**The CHAIR:** Certainly. The first period of questions is allotted to non-government members. I call the member for Southern Downs.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** On behalf of the opposition, I pass on our best wishes to the minister who is recovering at the moment. We wish him all the best. Budget Paper No. 2 says that the Beattie government expects to raise \$105 million from the new ambulance tax. Your Ministerial Portfolio Statement says that the Queensland Ambulance Service budget for 2003-04 is \$278 million, up from \$263 million actual in the previous financial year. Minister, the ambulance tax will raise \$105 million, yet the QAS budget has gone up by just \$15 million. Where is the rest of the money?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I thank the member for the question. The financial problems of the subscription scheme have been well documented. It is estimated that the shortfall in revenue from the subscription scheme would have increased to approximately \$23 million in 2004-05. The introduction of the community ambulance cover was designed to provide a sustainable funding base for the Queensland Ambulance Service. The 2003-04 budget has provided additional funding to enhance service delivery within the Queensland Ambulance Service, including funding to employ an additional 110 officers and funding for additional vehicles and ambulance stations.

The 2002-03 budget provided for total revenues of some \$254 million. With the introduction of the community ambulance cover and other minor adjustments, total revenue for 2003-04 is budgeted to be \$278 million, an increase of \$24 million or nine per cent. The 2002-03 budget estimated that \$56 million would be raised by the subscription scheme alone. In addition, that budget provided for revenue of approximately \$21 million to be raised from transport charges raised by non-subscribers. The cost of providing services to subscribers and non-subscribers, excluding pensioners who are fully funded by the consolidated fund, was significantly in excess of the \$77 million raised from the subscription scheme and transport charges. This shortfall was covered in 2002-03 by additional allocations from the consolidated fund.

Out of the total budget revenues for QAS in 2002-03 of \$254 million the consolidated fund contributed \$138 million and the subscription and transport charges contributed \$77 million. For 2003-04 the community ambulance cover arrangements will provide funding of \$99 million and the consolidated fund \$137 million towards the total budget revenue for the Queensland Ambulance Service of \$278 million.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So the minister can give an absolute guarantee that each and every cent raised by the ambulance levy will be going into the Queensland Ambulance Service and no other moneys which would have otherwise gone in there from the consolidated fund will be pulled back? Can the minister also give an indication of this year's budgeted growth? We will talk about the estimates of \$254 million and \$278 million and how that compares with the previous year's—2001-02—budget estimate.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is two questions. I might deal with them separately.

**The CHAIR:** The minister is entitled to answer the first question. Perhaps the member for Southern Downs can repeat the second question.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The only caveat that I make in answering the question is that there is that administration cost that will go to the electricity authority of \$5.5 million, from memory, which takes it from \$105.5 million down to the \$99 million. Apart from that, \$99 million goes to the Queensland Ambulance Service. Do you want to ask your second question again to help me out?

**The CHAIR:** Please ask the second question again. I cannot remember it myself.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You have given a guarantee that there has not been any intention to put money in and withdraw your consolidated commitment.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It has to go to consolidated revenue and then it is passed on.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** It is not smoke and mirrors. I want to look at the budget estimate for 2002-03 and the estimate for 2003-04. Have you got the figures there for the 2001-02 year? The reason is that I want to get an indication whether it is actual growth that happens anyway—the \$20 million-odd.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Apart from wanting to push the boundaries outside the province of the current estimates debate—and I would not want my answer to be seen as a precedent for future questions about previous years—the budget for the Queensland Ambulance Service in 2001-02 was \$235.8 million. The budget last financial year was \$253.8 million and the anticipated budget for 2003-04 is \$276.2 million. That represents from 2001-02 to 2002-03 an increase of \$17.9 million and an increase from last financial year to this financial year of some \$27.8 million. That is a significant increase—as I said in my opening remarks—above CPI and provides for real growth to fund a number of major initiatives such as 110 additional paramedics and ongoing vehicle replacement and a significant increase in the capital works program right across emergency services but including the Queensland Ambulance Service.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** You said in your introduction that the capital works budget for the Queensland Ambulance Service would rise by \$77 million this year. Does this capital works budget contain, for the first time, ambulance vehicles? If so, how much of this figure is allocated for the purchase of ambulance vehicles?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The capital works budget does include that component for replacement of vehicles or new vehicles.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So it does include it for the first time?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Not for the first time.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** So ambulance vehicles have previously been included in the capital works budget?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Yes.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Just last year's or years before that?

**Mr Taylor:** Vehicles, buildings, land and major equipment items have been included for several years in the capital statements.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** What is the value of those vehicles for this coming year?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Apart from being significant, I will give you some more details. The budget for 2003-04 for vehicle replacement and new vehicles is \$9.8 million.

**Mr MALONE:** Pass on my regards to the minister. I am sure we are all aware of his situation and hope that he recovers soon enough to come back to parliament to answer some questions on behalf of the department. Acting Minister, in reference to the prehearing question on notice No. 6 that the department had incurred costs of \$623,000 in the implementation of the ambulance levy, what are the departmental administration costs expected to be over the next financial year in running forward this CAC? What are the costs for next year in carrying forward this CAC?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** In terms of administering—

**Mr MALONE:** The CAC.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You would have had to have asked the Treasurer that question, because the administration of the CAC is that component that is collected via the electricity authorities and administered by the Office of State Revenue.

**Mr MALONE:** That then raises another question in terms of the departmental budgets. You have a fixed figure on the net figure that the departmental operations will retain out of that CAC levy. Therefore, there should be a figure within your department of the total revenue that is raised by the CAC levy and what will be returned to the department, because you use that as the budget.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** As I indicated before, we estimate that around about \$105.5 million will be collected by the levy. What will be passed on to the department, or the Queensland Ambulance Service, will be \$99 million, the \$5.5 million being the costs to electricity authorities that will be incurred as a result of collecting the levy. So that goes to the Office of State Revenue. That money that is collected is transferred through the Office of State Revenue to the Queensland Ambulance Service, which is, we estimate, around about the \$99 million mark.

**Mr MALONE:** So with simple arithmetic, we find that there is a cost of about \$6 million—from \$105 million to \$99 million—that will be the cost of collecting the levy; is that correct?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That is the estimate that was provided by the Treasurer in yesterday's estimates hearing.

**Mr MALONE:** Subsequently in the MPS it appears that a budgeted figure of less than \$90 million is being returned to the QAS.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You will have to provide us with some idea of where to look for that one.

**Mr MALONE:** Page 2 of the MPS.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Just exactly where on page 2?

**Mr MALONE:** I just cannot pick it up, either. Sorry, page 17 of the MPS. It seems like I might have the lines crossed here, but it appears regularly within the MPS that there is a budget return to the QAS of somewhere less than \$90 million. Can you confirm that or not?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Without you being able to provide the reference —

**Mr MALONE:** We might come back to that. I just do not appear to have the reference here.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It might be best.

**Mr Taylor:** I might be able to explain that, if you like. Included in the output revenue is not only the community ambulance cover—

**The CHAIR:** Could you give us the reference to the page?

**Mr Taylor:** I am on page 17, which is the output performance statement for the Ambulance Service. Output revenue is made up of a range of things, not just the community ambulance cover. Last year the charges for transports between hospitals was included as output revenue. It is now included in grants and other contributions. So you will see the increase in grants and other contributions. You cannot just take one figure from the other to get the CAC net component. The CAC amount that we are budgeting is \$99.25 million.

**Mr MALONE:** So that is the budgeted net figure from the CAC. In the prehearing questions on notice—No. 6 again—it states that over half the cost of implementing the ambulance levy was promotional costs. As an opinion, do you think that is a fair expenditure of taxpayers' funds, given that we were led to believe that the QAS was strapped for cash?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not too sure that I am here to offer opinions. I am not too sure how you can refer to the Queensland Ambulance Service as now being strapped for cash when the very purpose of the introduction of the community ambulance levy was to secure the funding for this vital organisation now and into the future. The importance attached to the campaign that was launched was to ensure that, particularly for those existing subscribers like myself, there would be no confusion as to what people's entitlements were in the lead-up to the introduction of the CAC. So from that point of view and given, as I have already noted in my opening remarks, that we are not detecting at this stage an increase in calls to 000 or an increase in calls for services provided by the QAS, it would seem to me that, on that benchmark, it was money well spent.

**Mr MALONE:** On page 2 of the MPS—the ambulance levy again—with reference to advertising and marketing, I refer to prehearing question No. 3—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sorry, page 2 again?

**Mr MALONE:** Yes. Really, the question refers to prehearing question on notice No. 3. I note that in the last two financial years the government has spent \$127,629 promoting the subscription scheme and then a further, as I said, \$338,000 promoting the new ambulance levy. If the department is aware of the problems within the subscriptions scheme and the proposal to introduce some levy, why was so much money spent on promoting the subscription scheme when it was about to be abolished? That goes back for quite some time into the previous year when there was a proposal to abolish that scheme.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That would reflect the ordinary marketing budget for the Queensland Ambulance Service to market the subscription scheme. Obviously the Queensland Ambulance Service could not just sit back while discussions or formulation of the community ambulance cover was under consideration with no final decision being provided by cabinet until the date that it was provided.

The cabinet process is the ultimate decision-making process. In the meantime, the Ambulance Service had to continue with its normal marketing strategies so that if cabinet decided

not to go ahead with the CAC, it would not have been cut short in terms of its normal marketing activities to ensure maintenance and, hopefully, an increase in subscribers.

I am sure that, had the Queensland Ambulance Service not done that and the CAC had not gone ahead, then your question would have been probably directed to the fact, 'Why did the QAS not continue with promoting the subscription scheme whilst the cabinet was deliberating on this issue?' So I do not think that there is anything particularly extraordinary about the QAS continuing to market its subscription scheme while the executive considered the long-term future of funding of the Queensland Ambulance Service.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you. I accept your logic in that. That begs the next question: by spending \$127,000 in promoting a subscription scheme, how successful was the department in gaining extra subscriptions?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Going way back to my time when I was actually the minister for this portfolio, one of the great challenges that the QAS faced was maintaining subscriber numbers. Why that was such a challenge was particularly as a result of changes made at the federal level with respect to private medical cover. Understandably, a lot of Queenslanders, based on the albeit sometimes limited coverage provided by their private medical insurance, chose not to continue with their ambulance subscription. So activities dating back, as I said, a number of years were targeted at explaining to people that their private medical insurance may not provide, and usually did not provide, the full extent of coverage with respect to ambulance services that they would otherwise have got had they been a subscriber, obviously because subscription revenue was vital for continuing and indeed expanding—

**Mr MALONE:** Could you tell me how many new subscribers you actually got out of that last financial year?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** They actually declined in the last financial year.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** I take it that the state government facilities will pay the ambulance levy. Can you give an indication of how much money will be raised from state government facilities such as schools?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** That would be a matter that you should have directed to the Treasurer. We do not run the collection side of things.

**Mr SPRINGBORG:** Basically, they will be charged it. So the individual departments are responsible for that.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** As I said, that is a question that you should have directed to the Treasurer as the responsible minister for the Office of State Revenue. I note just for the record that plenty of time was provided to the shadow treasurer to ask those questions, but for some strange reason he ran short by about an hour and five minutes with the Treasurer yesterday. So that would have been a question that could have been slotted in nicely in the time that he chose not to take up with the Treasurer during his estimates.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time allotted for non-government members at this point having expired, I now call on the member for Toowoomba North.

**Mr SHINE:** I would like to pass on my best wishes to Minister Reynolds. I know that he would love to be here at the moment.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thank you.

**Mr SHINE:** I am aware of statements being circulated by the opposition that the community ambulance cover is merely a grab for revenue. Many people in my electorate see this as a continuation of the negative spoiling antics that have characterised the opposition. They have commented to me that they are bemused by the fact that the opposition has attacked the policy but has not bothered to offer any alternatives to it. Unlike the opposition, my constituents understand the importance of this levy and how essential it is to ensure that the high standards employed by the Queensland Ambulance Service are maintained. Could you please advise how these funds will be utilised for the benefit of all Queenslanders?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I thank the member for Toowoomba North for his question. I recognise his constituents for their support of the new community ambulance cover. On the first of this month, the community ambulance cover—or CAC as it is now commonly known—replaced the voluntary Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme as it had become increasingly unsustainable. The CAC represents a new approach to funding our Ambulance Service and the expected return is in the order of \$105 million.

By using an existing billing system, administrative costs are projected to be approximately \$5 million, which is almost half of the current cost of administering the Queensland Ambulance Service subscription scheme. I can assure you that all funds raised by the CAC levy will be directed to the Queensland Ambulance Service.

The estimated \$105 million raised by the CAC will be used to part-fund the total annual financial needs of the QAS. This levy has helped bring the 2003-04 financial year budget for the QAS to a record \$276.2 million—substantially more than provided under the Borbidge government. This new funding will provide for a range of services, equipment and, most importantly, personnel for our Ambulance Service. This includes the employment of 110 additional student and trained paramedics, which as I mentioned in my opening statement is the largest increase in the history of the Queensland Ambulance Service; the construction of new ambulance stations and the refurbishment of existing stations; the training of paramedics and communications staff within the organisation; the purchase of new equipment for ambulance stations; the replacement or upgrade of vehicles; and the implementation of community education campaigns aimed at providing lifesaving skills for members of the community. Such support is essential to maintaining standards and a world-class Ambulance Service for the people of Queensland.

Community ambulance cover provides the QAS with a stable and predictable funding base and, although we are only three weeks in, we are already seeing the results. For the first time every Queensland resident is covered for ambulance services anywhere in Australia. People who do not have the financial means to cover themselves and their families can now rest assured that they can call an ambulance in an emergency without the fear of a bill. No Queenslanders, regardless of their economic circumstances, will be faced with the prospect of a bill of up to \$755 for ambulance transport, as non-subscribers were previously charged under the subscription scheme. The Queensland Ambulance Service is known worldwide for its achievements and high standards of care and service. These can only be enhanced through the CAC.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I would also like to convey my best wishes to the minister. Many pensioners in my electorate are concerned about attacks by members of the opposition on the free ambulance services provided to pensioners, Seniors Card holders, veteran Gold Card holders and their dependents. They have an exemption for a very good reason. They have contributed to this state for many years and have thus earned the right to free ambulance services. Could the acting minister please explain why there is no intention of removing the exemption for these Queenslanders from paying community ambulance cover?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thankyou for the question. I am sure that everyone is aware and getting tired of the opposition's continued campaign of pensioner bashing and scaremongering with claims that the free pensioner service broke the back of the Queensland Ambulance Service. The opposition does not have a great track record in the financial management of emergency services. In its first term in office, the Beattie government instituted one of the most comprehensive funding reviews ever done within Emergency Services and for the first time identified the real costs of delivering current and future services to all sections of the community. Before that review, the coalition had very little idea of ambulance funding arrangements. The independent review actually identified that the ambulance fees and charges set by the Borbidge government were progressively placing the QAS in a far worse financial position.

Free ambulance services for pensioners were not the reason for introducing the community ambulance cover. The free pensioner policy has not broken the back of the QAS. Prior to 1998, pensioners, like all others in the community, could choose to subscribe or not to the QAS. Those pensioners who did subscribe contributed less than \$20 million to the QAS subscription scheme. At that time, the actual cost of providing the service to pensioners was \$75 million. Now it is close to \$120 million. So the fact is that ambulance services provided to pensioners have always been subsidised, by both sides of government. For the opposition to claim anything different is merely promoting misinformation.

With the introduction of the Beattie government's free ambulance services to pensioners policy the actual revenue loss to the QAS was \$20 million—an amount that would have hardly broken the back of the service. The introduction of community ambulance cover this month means that all Queenslanders are covered for ambulance services anywhere in Australia. Also, for the first time in its 110-year history the QAS will be provided with an adequate and predictable funding base.

For the community and the QAS, the introduction of community ambulance cover is the right decision that guarantees a first-class ambulance service well into the future. However, for the

opposition it creates a bit of a problem. If it sincerely believes that the free pensioner system has broken the back of the QAS, what policies is it promoting? Is it promoting a policy that will require a return to the pensioner-pays arrangements or is it promoting a return to bankcard economics whereby the hard decisions are not made and services are provided on credit? No, we will not change the arrangements in place for pensioners, Seniors Card holders, veteran Gold Card holders and their dependents. They will continue to have free ambulance cover as long as the Beattie government is in office. However, as a result of lobbying from pensioner groups, pensioners are now able to make a donation to the QAS should they choose to do so. This will be entirely voluntary for each pensioner.

**Mr LEE:** I am aware that stage 2 of the building and other legislation amendment regulations came into force on 1 July of this year. I understand that this legislation will make boarding house and hostel type accommodation much safer, which has some significance for my electorate, where we recently had a guesthouse fire. Can the acting minister please advise how this legislation makes budget accommodation safer and minimises the risk of a repetition of the tragedies of Childers and Sandgate?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The introduction of the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Act last year supported changes to building fire regulations and new fire safety standards for budget accommodation buildings in Queensland. Essentially, the new laws require all of the state's budget accommodation buildings to meet minimum fire safety standards, including the installation of smoke alarms and the development of fire safety management plans. Over the past year firefighters and officers from the Department of Local Government and Planning have been working with accommodation building owners to ensure they understand their regulatory obligations under the act. We will continue to do that, because it is to everyone's benefit to have the best possible fire-safe budget accommodation buildings in the state.

The fire safety changes for boarding houses, backpackers, country hotels and supported accommodation buildings were developed as a result of recommendations from a task force I established after the Childers hostel fire in June 2000. Since the new legislation was passed by parliament in April last year, the Department of Local Government and Planning and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service officers have held more than 25 stakeholder information sessions for local government staff, building certifiers and fire safe officers, building owners, managers and occupiers. Information on the new fire safety standards has also been made available to owners and occupiers via the Internet, while CD-ROMs and videos have also been produced.

From the beginning of July, fire officers have carried out random audits of budget accommodation buildings to assess their levels of compliance. Owners who have clearly not commenced rectification or upgrading work could face on-the-spot fines or other legal action. However, while the Fire Commissioner has encouraged his staff to take a strong line, the QFRS is also committed to providing all support necessary to assist owners wanting to increase fire safety standards. At the end of the day, we all want buildings that provide safe accommodation for residents, whether they are tourists, people on low incomes or people with a disability.

Owners who have their properties inspected and have clearly not commenced rectification or upgrading work could face on-the-spot fines or other legal action. An extension of time on the 1 July 2003 deadline may be sought from the local council, based on undue hardship to the occupants of the building. Recommendation 10 of the Childers task force identified a range of high-risk buildings, other than budget accommodation buildings, and recommended that fire safety in those buildings also be improved.

In addition to the commencement of the new standards for budget accommodation, the building fire safety project team has been focusing on other high-risk buildings. A database on high-risk-to-life buildings in Queensland is being developed for this purpose. As part of development of occupational licensing, which is outlined in recommendation 4 of the Childers task force report, the QFRS, in conjunction with the Building Services Authority and the fire protection industry, has been developing both state and national competencies in relation to fire safety system inspectors and fire safety system certifiers. Recommendations of the Childers task force report will continue to be progressed, including the ongoing development of guidelines, the continuation of working with industry on occupational licensing and the implementation of legislative requirements and guidelines for high-risk-to-life buildings.

**The CHAIR:** I want to focus on the national aerial firefighting strategy and refer you to page 43 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, where there is a reference to the QFRS continuing discussions with other state fire services to develop a national aerial firefighting strategy. There was a recent meeting of state and territory emergency services ministers, as I understand it,

where the national aerial firefighting strategy was discussed. At that meeting ministers condemned the federal government for backing out of its commitment to fund a national pool of firefighting aircraft. Could you as acting minister advise of any further developments towards the establishment of the national aerial firefighting strategy and Queensland's participation in it?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I thank you for the question. In May of this year emergency services ministers met in Melbourne and called on the Commonwealth to fund a national pool of firefighting aircraft to better combat future bushfires. At the time, Emergency Services Minister Mike Reynolds said that the Commonwealth's failure to live up to its commitment to fund a national pool of firefighting aircraft had diminished the ability to respond to that summer's bushfires.

A Commonwealth commissioned report in August last year, by the Australasian Fire Authorities Council, had established the need for a national pool of firefighting aircraft. It recommended that the federal government commit \$22.86 million towards the project. Instead, federal Regional Services Minister Wilson Tuckey announced in September, with no forewarning, that the Commonwealth would contribute only \$5.5 million towards leasing three heavy Aircrane helicopters. Mr Tuckey chose to ignore the report by AFAC and the need to develop, establish and fund a national aerial firefighting strategy. The state and territory emergency services ministers have repeatedly called on the Commonwealth to adequately fund this pool of firefighting aircraft.

Although not as vital in firefighting in Queensland for various reasons, aerial firefighting is becoming an increasingly important piece of weaponry, particularly for the southern states, when it comes to putting out bushfires quickly. This is especially the case with fires in remote and inaccessible areas, whereas previously we would have had to wait for the fire to come to ground based firefighters. Aerial firefighting enables us to put out a bushfire before it gathers serious momentum.

In the communique issued at their meeting, the state and territory ministers resolved to note that the federal government had failed to adequately finance a national firefighting fleet for bushfires and that inaccessible fires in southern states last summer might have been controlled better with a bigger fleet. The ministers called on the federal government to establish an ongoing, adequately funded and appropriately structured fleet for national use for Australia's next bushfire season. They also supported a national approach to aerial firefighting to improve the sharing of resources nationally and enhance aerial firefighting arrangements in line with the AFAC report of August 2002.

The ministers voted to support the principle of a state and territory controlled management legal entity to facilitate the tender and operational processes for a national aerial firefighting strategy. They also put on record the inadequacy of the \$5.5 million allocation from the 2003-04 Commonwealth budget for its watered down version of a national aerial firefighting fleet. The ministers also collectively undertook to make recommendations to the Commonwealth to support the AFAC recommendations based on a three-year leasing contract to provide surety to all jurisdictions on the provision of such aerial resources.

Despite these differences in opinion, Queensland has participated in the development of the national aerial firefighting strategy. This state's continued involvement with the national aerial firefighting strategy will also provide access to any Commonwealth funding arrangements in the future. I would also like to point out that the Department of Emergency Services, through the CDRS, already has a comprehensive database of resources that includes locally available agricultural aircraft. The director-general has indicated that additional departmental funding will be made available should the need arise.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I am aware that there has been no sudden increase in demand for ambulance services since 1 July, when community ambulance cover was introduced. I congratulate the community for taking a responsible approach when calling an ambulance. However, I am also aware of the general increase in demand for ambulance services over a longer period. This is due to the crisis brought about by the federal government policy on bulk-billing and other factors. I know that in my electorate the Beattie government has significantly boosted ambulance services to help counteract this federal government neglect. Can you tell the committee what is being done on a statewide basis?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The Beattie government, along with the Queensland Ambulance Service, is absolutely determined to ensure our ambulances are not misused by the community. Most

people understand the importance of the QAS and know that unreasonable use of ambulance services could put the life of another patient at risk.

However, the growth in demand from an increasing and ageing population for ambulance services over the last few years, particularly in the emergency response code 1 and 2 categories, continues to put pressure on available QAS paramedic resources. In collaboration with other ambulance jurisdictions, the QAS is continuing to identify causal factors which impact on achieving operational service delivery performance targets. The department is implementing a range of remedial strategies to improve the critical area of code 1 or life-threatening emergency responses. Performance is benchmarked nationally through a convention of ambulance authorities.

In December 2002 the QAS upgraded the medical priority dispatch process in all communications centres. This was to ensure the correct prioritising and allocation of resources to emergency incidents. The upgrade to the process has enabled a reduction in unnecessary multiple responses to single incidents and allows for improved paramedic coverage across all emergency incidents. The QAS is continuing to utilise a comprehensive work force modelling approach to better match available resources with demand for service. In the life of the current enterprise partnership agreement, QAS, in partnership with staff and the union, is reviewing statewide roster and coverage issues and revising where necessary to ensure that service delivery rosters are linked to community demand profiles.

Through the detailed analysis of service delivery profiles, QAS is able to precisely allocate additional resources to specific areas and ambulance locations to meet identified demand growth patterns. QAS has commissioned a Queensland ambulance case information reporting project to provide real-time operational reporting from existing computer aided dispatch systems. This is expected to improve the flow of essential information to allow rapid decision making by all levels of management.

In addition, continued education of medical officers in the eligibility criteria for ambulance transport for non-emergency—code 3 and code 4—patients has reduced the number of non-emergency responses. This is all while the QAS experienced a 14.2 per cent increase in demand for urgent responses and attended more emergency code 1 responses over the past year than ever before.

We have also continued to proactively manage the growth in demand and implement initiatives to maintain ambulance response times. These include further development of the QAS patient transport service to reduce the frequency of emergency crews being tasked with non-urgent cases; improved and standardised procedures incorporated into all communications centres; pager systems introduced to speed up communications to on-road response crews; station designs improved to minimise emergency turnout times; the review of station work practices in an effort to improve turnout times; and the introduction of an organisational-wide focus on response times across all aspects of service delivery to ensure that response times are optimised at every possible opportunity.

**Mr SHINE:** Leaders of the coalition parties have both publicly alleged a \$7.5 million cut in the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service vehicles budget. I find this hard to believe given that in my electorate firefighters are telling me that their vehicles, equipment and training under the Beattie government have vastly improved from the often substandard treatment they received under the coalition government. I suspect this is the opposition's usual flexibility with the budget figures, but could you, as Acting Emergency Services Minister, please refute these claims and inform us of the correct situation with regard to the funding of QFRS vehicles?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Gladly. Earlier this year the opposition did allege that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's vehicle replacement program funding had been cut under the Beattie government. The opposition, as usual, was up to its old tricks of playing with the figures. The figures the opposition quoted failed to take into account a large boost to funding in the 1999-2000 financial year because of the Beattie government's 14.3 per cent increase to the fire levy that year. Also, a further \$2.5 million was provided by the government as the final year of a three-year \$7.5 million election commitment to upgrade Rural Fire Service appliances. In following years the funding levels were lower when compared with this peak, but the figures themselves do not tell the whole story.

If the opposition had taken the time to look into this matter, it would have found that the Beattie government has continually boosted funding to ensure that Queensland firefighters are better equipped and better prepared than ever before. Queensland has a hazard reduction

burning program, where fire services carry out the burning of accumulated dead timber and other fire fuel throughout the state during winter and the start of spring. The Beattie government has supplied more than 500 purpose-built rural fire trucks, which has reduced the age of Queensland's rural fire fleet. As a result, more than half of the state's 900 strong rural fire fleet is now less than six years old.

The quality of these Queensland vehicles has been recognised over recent years when our fire crews have travelled interstate to assist fellow firefighters. The vehicle construction program for 2003-04 will deliver an anticipated 38 vehicles to urban fire brigades and a further 52 vehicles to rural fire brigades along with another 32 fire trailers. Since 1998 the Beattie government has provided a massive \$82 million towards the construction of 628 urban and rural fire appliances.

In 1998-99 the QFRS developed a seven-year appliance replacement plan to manage the replacement of its ageing fleet. Excellent progress has been made in upgrading both the urban and rural fleets, and the department is on track to achieve targets of having no urban vehicle over 15 years old and no rural vehicles over 20 years old in service by December 2005, except in the case of some well-loved RFS vehicles which must hold a roadworthy certificate.

The upgrade program requires expenditure of between \$11 million and \$14 million a year for urban appliances, depending on the mix of vehicles planned for acquisition in that year, and \$3.3 million a year for rural appliances. Fire appliance prices vary from \$55,000 to more than \$1.2 million, depending on the role and level of equipment supplied with the vehicle. This wide range of vehicle types is necessary to respond to fire, rescue and other emergency incidents faced by the QFRS across Queensland.

In the case of rural appliances, an additional half a million dollars has been injected into the program between 2002-03 and 2004-05. This has been to accelerate the current upgrade program following commitments to increase the bushfire fighting capability of QFRS in the wake of the Linton coronial inquiry and catastrophic bushfire experiences in southern states in 2001-02 and 2002-03.

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

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, undoubtedly you will be pleased to know that I will not be asking you to discuss with the committee issues surrounding the collection method for the ambulance levy as a result of recent discussions with the government—at least we will wait for Minister Reynolds to recover.

A comparison of the expenditure for building infrastructure between departments such as the Police Service, the Department of Justice and the Department of Emergency Services appears to see some considerable difference in scale, with Emergency Services being at the bottom. A significant number of rural fire brigades, in my opinion, appear to exist the way the old Queensland Ambulance Transport Brigade did by raffling meat trays and suchlike to supplement government expenditure. Given the increasing load upon the fire service generally, the diversity of their task and the need to have advanced training, when will we see the funding of a fire service for the future as opposed to the bandaid funding that we have witnessed today?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not too sure how I can possibly respond to that, Bill. You might know that I have had some experience with fire services over many years. Can I assure you that—

**Mr FLYNN:** Mr Chairman, may I clarify that for the benefit of the minister?

**The CHAIR:** Yes, you may do so.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Prior to entering parliament I was State Secretary and National President of the United Firefighters Union.

**Mr FLYNN:** In other words, we might see an effort by government, specifically the Department of Emergency Services, to bring the Rural Fire Service up to the standard of the Ambulance Service which we now see as a result of the levy.

**The CHAIR:** Perhaps the minister can treat that as a clarification.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will treat it accordingly. The Beattie Labor government continues to improve the funding of rural fire services of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This enables the Rural Fire Service to undertake long-term planning without the need to request additional funds except for specific initiatives. This, in turn, assists the Rural Fire Service in providing volunteers with the support they need to undertake the various tasks of community education, fire mitigation and fire suppression in rural Queensland.

The combined rural operating, expense and capital budget for 2003-04 is forecast to be \$16.76 million, not including depreciation. This year marks the fourth year of the seven-year initiative that provides \$2.7 million per annum for the Veteran Replacement Appliance Program. This funding assists the Rural Fire Service in providing state-of-the-art appliances to rural fire brigades.

This initiative, supplemented by other funds, is aimed at reducing the maximum age of appliances operated by rural fire brigades of less than 20 years by the end of 2005, as I indicated to the member for Toowoomba North, except in cases where rural fire brigades have a particular attachment to a well-loved old appliance like the old blitzes you see around the place which we got during World War II, I think, and where those brigades are reluctant to give those vehicles up. They must, however, have a current roadworthy certificate.

The funding for rural fire brigades continues to increase under the Beattie government, and one of the challenges faced by the Queensland Rural Fire Service and the Queensland fire service generally is to respond to the tragedy at Linton in Victoria. The findings by the coroner on that tragedy—now a number of years ago—have lessons for all fire services. That is why we have responded by providing \$7.78 million over five years to enable the Rural Fire Service to implement major improvements to volunteer training and safety, including the provision of better personal protection equipment.

**Mr BELL:** I have two questions for the Acting Emergency Services Minister in relation to SES personnel training, to which page 26 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements refers. In a question on notice I drew attention to the fact that only 75 per cent of people in a survey expressed satisfaction last year with the training of SES stakeholders, and I asked why. In response, it was pointed out to me that that did not mean 25 per cent were actively dissatisfied. Some of the respondents to a 225-person strong survey had indicated 'do not know' or they were dissatisfied solely with the timing of the training and assessment. How many of those 220 people replied 'do not know' or were solely dissatisfied with the timing of the training and assessment?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Alan, you might wish to answer that question.

**Mr Brunner:** Just let me repeat the question. You are really wanting to know how many people responded that they did not know?

**Mr BELL:** No, I was told that it was not 25 per cent who were actively dissatisfied with the training because some had answered 'do not know' or some were just unhappy with the times. I am trying to get at just how the survey result was skewed by those particular people. How fewer than 25 per cent of people are really unhappy?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You might want to talk generally about how the survey was conducted, Alan. That might assist the member for Surfers Paradise.

**Mr Brunner:** When we responded to that question, we said that there was this misinterpretation of the survey results. The volunteers were asked to rate from 1 'strongly disagree' to 5 'strongly agree' 10 statements including 'I am satisfied with the range of SES training I receive annually', 'training that is delivered is relevant to me', 'the competencies that I have gained from the SES enable me to perform my role within the SES unit safely and effectively', and, lastly, 'training and assessment times and venues are convenient to me'.

It is important to note that the respondent could answer 'do not know' rather than the 1 to 5 responses as outlined. The responses for each question were then aggregated to provide a measure of stakeholder satisfaction referred to in the question. Consideration of the actual questions asked in the survey indicates that a low score—for instance, in relation to training and assessment times—does not indicate dissatisfaction with the quality of training. The survey questions seek feedback that assist in the continued improvement in the relevance, quality and mode of training provided, rather than to encourage responses that ensure publication of a 100 per cent satisfaction result.

We continue to put a lot of effort into the training of the SES and we are continuing to improve the training. Surveys like this are very important in order to help us identify problems with the training and the way it is delivered.

**Mr BELL:** How many were actually dissatisfied?

**Mr Brunner:** At this point I cannot answer that.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** We might put that on notice for you and get back to you.

**Mr BELL:** Thank you, Minister. My other question, which is related, is that in answer to my question on notice I was advised that funding for training last year was \$1.625 million and funding for training in 2003-04 will be \$1.665 million, an increase of only \$40,000 which does not keep pace with CPI increases. Why has the training allocation not kept pace at least with inflation?

**Mr Brunner:** We are continually trying hard to make the dollars that we receive go as far as possible. In trying to do that, we are spreading the actual resources that SES volunteers have access to as widely as possible. We are attempting to be much more efficient in the delivery of training. We are going through a system of audits of units around the whole of Queensland in order to identify the actual skills needed and focus the training on those skills. So, while you may look at the dollar figure as not increasing in line with inflation, the reality is that the actual delivery is much more focused and much more effective.

The other thing I might add in answering this question is that in undertaking safety audits of each of our units we are actually identifying the sorts of roles that they need to provide within their local community and targeting the training to meet the community's needs. The reality is that just looking at dollars does not give you the outcome that the question really demands. The reality is that we are trying particularly hard to deliver our services much more effectively, make sure that they are as targeted as possible and make sure that the training that is provided is the training that is really needed within that community.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, all Queenslanders now pay a community ambulance levy, some many times over. We also assume that most Queenslanders would have access to an ambulance service. I can assure you that there are many communities and numerous individuals throughout Queensland who do not have access to an ambulance service. It is difficult to find in the budget papers where there are programs to cover those areas in Queensland that currently do not have a QAS service. Could you or one of your departmental staff indicate some increased funding in areas that are deficient in the QAS service and if there are any alternative ways of supplying that service to rural communities?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The very simple answer to that is the announcement that this year there will be 110 additional positions funded by the introduction of the CAC. If you can provide us with an example of where—

**Mr MALONE:** Which communities are you going to—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sorry, could you provide us with an example of where you believe there is not satisfactory ambulance coverage? That will provide us with an opportunity to provide you with a detailed answer in relation to that specific community.

**Mr MALONE:** We could go on all day with that, Minister. I can identify hundreds of—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** So you do not have a list? If you give us the list we will give you the answer.

**Mr MALONE:** I could identify hundreds of areas in my electorate that have no sufficient cover—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Like?

**Mr MALONE:** They are right through western Queensland.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Give me an example.

**Mr MALONE:** West of Walkerston and west of Nebo.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** So Walkerston.

**Mr MALONE:** West of Walkerston.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** What initiatives are in place with respect to the issue of Walkerston?

**Mr MALONE:** They are quite minor compared to a lot of other communities that have no ambulance cover at all.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Like?

**Mr MALONE:** West of Longreach in those small, remote areas.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** They are covered by the aerial ambulance.

**Mr MALONE:** So what programs do you have to upgrade the aerial ambulance?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** For what community? Sorry, for the aerial ambulance?

**Mr MALONE:** I am being generic in this. I am talking about areas that have no access to a vehicle ambulance as such. Can you identify programs that will cover those more remote regions? I am sure I do not need to detail those. Surely you are worldly enough to understand—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I think you should, but I will get the commissioner to outline the wonderful work that we are doing.

**Mr Higgins:** There are a number of things that we are actually doing in remote and rural communities to improve the provision of services for those communities. In a number of areas, particularly in the growth areas of Queensland, we are putting in an additional four new stations this financial year. They include Howard, an additional station at Birkdale and at Narangba and a new field office at Kowanyama in Cape York. In a number of communities where we are supporting remote and rural service delivery we have initiated a number of Community First Responder programs where they provide for community capacity building in areas that would not currently warrant a professional Ambulance Service with all of the infrastructure associated with that. We have initiated a number of those programs in smaller communities. For example, at Kenilworth we are looking at programs at the likes of Imbil and other locations.

We are also supporting a number of communities right across the state with the support of local government to develop interest in Community First Responder programs. That means that we are able to provide an immediate first response out of the community which is backed up by a professional ambulance response by the QAS. We found that that has significantly improved service delivery to a number of those communities. Of course, a number of the communities that are in more remote parts of the state are supported with the assistance of the Royal Flying Doctor Service and our aeromedical services through rotary winged aircraft.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Not to mention the work under way to provide incentives to retain staff in rural and remote areas of Queensland.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I wonder if you might take that on notice so I can get an idea of the communities that you are actually supporting. Can you do that?

**Mr Higgins:** Yes.

**Mr MALONE:** I would appreciate it. Note 3 on page 18 of the ministerial papers relates to interhealth facility transfers. What amount of money was raised from interhealth facility transfers this financial year and how does that compare to previous years?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sorry, what note?

**Mr MALONE:** It is note 3.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Page 18?

**Mr MALONE:** Page 18. What effect has the levy had on interhealth facility transfers?

**Mr Higgins:** We have increased the amount of revenue to be obtained through the provision of interhealth facility transfers provided by the QAS to Queensland Health. That funding is in addition to any funding raised through the community ambulance cover. In effect the QAS has three sources of revenue through the consolidated fund for pensioners, Seniors Card holders, Gold Card veterans, et cetera. We have funding through third-party providers such as Queensland Health for interfacility transfers through the Motor Accident Insurance Commission and through WorkCover. We also raise the funding through the community ambulance cover. They are our three primary sources of revenue. We will continue to negotiate with Queensland Health on an ongoing basis an activity based agreement that is based on the number of interfacility transfers that are conducted by the QAS for Queensland Health. That funding for this year is around about \$20.5 million.

**Mr MALONE:** How does that compare to the previous year?

**Mr Higgins:** It has increased marginally from last year. It was approximately \$19.152 million last year and it increased to \$20.994 million this year.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I refer to page 9 of the MPS which mentions the improved and standardised procedures of all com centres. What has been the total cost to date of amalgamating QFRS and QAS com centres, and how is that initiative progressing?

**Mr Higgins:** We would not have precise estimates. There are three communication centres run by Emergency Services where we have co-located Queensland Ambulance and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service communication centres. They are located at Cairns, Toowoomba and our AFcom centre in Brisbane. They have been co-located for some considerable period of time so we would not have precise estimates as to the cost of the co-location arrangements. Obviously

we regard that as a more efficient approach—to share the technology and the infrastructure associated with relatively expensive communications facilities.

Our objective is to continue to work more effectively and collaboratively together to improve communication services for Emergency Services across-the-board and to ensure that where there are opportunities to use our resources more efficiently by co-location that will be a continued feature of the Department of Emergency Services arrangements.

**Mr MALONE:** On page 9 of the MPS under the amalgamation of the CAD system, is it true that Motorola advised the QAS that the technology used in the CAD system is now dated and five versions behind the current standard? It is also said that despite a call for capital allocation in the budget of \$930,000 for the upgrades the QAS will still be two versions behind the accepted standard. Would you like to comment on that?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will have Jim answer that.

**Mr Higgins:** We are currently using two computer aided dispatch systems in Queensland. We use the Motorola system which has been in place since approximately 1997, PremierCAD. That is used in three of our communication centres in Brisbane, Maroochydore and the south-east region on the Gold Coast at Southport. That technology is currently under review. We are working collaboratively with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and with the Queensland Police Service to look at the communication requirements for all emergency services. CBRC has requested a document to look at the opportunities to share resources between the three Emergency Services agencies for communication services for the future. That is a project that is under way at present. A submission will be made to CBRC identifying the opportunities for improved collaboration across the services later this year.

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

**Mr LEE:** Acting Minister, volunteers do a wonderful job serving their communities in times of need. When I am out in my electorate I am often quite amazed by the scope and quality of work undertaken by volunteers in a wide range of areas. I am told that the Department of Emergency Services has around 85,000 volunteers working in a whole host of important roles. Can you outline the contribution that these volunteers make to their communities right across the length and breadth of Queensland and what assistance the DES provides for these wonderful people?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** One in 40 Queenslanders is a volunteer in the emergency services. I would like to again acknowledge the commitment and dedication of these men and women to the safety and welfare of all Queenslanders. These people give up their time and effort as members of the Rural Fire Brigade, State Emergency Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue Association, local ambulance committees, honorary ambulance officers, CPR2000 volunteers, Response Advice to Chemical Emergencies, or RACE, teams, Australian Volunteer Coastguard Association, Surf Life Saving Queensland and the Royal Life Saving Society of Queensland. Volunteers play a major role in our society and their efforts and dedication are greatly appreciated.

Queensland is vast and wide, and without the thousands of volunteer men and women who are members of emergency service teams it would not be possible to manage many of the incidents that occur in rural and regional areas each year. When you consider that many are people who work and have other commitments in the area, you can really appreciate their commitment. That is why the government is determined to ensure that our volunteers have the best possible equipment, resources and support needed to carry out their work.

The volunteer support package announced in the 2002-03 budget provided \$18.9 million over four years as part of the government's commitment to the ongoing support of the vital role the volunteers undertake in delivering emergency and counterdisaster services. This package will ensure the ongoing safety and wellbeing of all our volunteers through the provision of structured training and increased standards of operational and personal protective equipment. It also supports and enhances the capability of the department's emergency service volunteer organisations and ensures their ongoing viability.

An additional \$1 million has been provided in the 2003-04 budget to further support volunteers and volunteer organisations including \$800,000 for the SES to provide flood boats, road accident rescue equipment, rescue trailers, communications and other equipment; \$150,000 to Surf Life Saving Queensland for priority equipment procurement projects; and \$50,000 for the development and implementation of volunteer marine rescue training infrastructure. The DES also has a range of future directions under the package for each of the agencies. The funding will help

develop a comprehensive set of training and infrastructure initiatives for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Rural Fire Service.

This will continue to be developed to provide enhanced support to Rural Fire Service volunteers including employing an additional three district training officers which will bring the total employed since July 2002 to six dedicated training officers being appointed to the Cairns Rural Fire Service district office to service the needs of local ATSI communities. It will also facilitate the delivery of distance training to Queensland's 45,000 rural fire volunteers and provide personal protective equipment such as fire resistant overalls, helmets, gloves, goggles and respirators. It will provide communications equipment and infrastructure including radio networks for rural fire operations, enhancing the fleet modernisation program to ensure that all rural vehicles in service are less than 20 years old by the end of 2005, and ongoing research into satellite technology for remote areas through a joint initiative between the Queensland Police Service, QFRS, QAS and Optus. I could go on with respect to the SES package and emergency service cadets and other initiatives, but unfortunately I am out of time.

**The CHAIR:** I have a question in relation to the Community Engagement Unit. Last year the opposition criticised the establishment of a Community Engagement Unit within the department on the grounds that it was a waste of time and money. I understand that this unit has made many valuable contributions to the department since its establishment. Could you outline these for the benefit of the committee?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It is interesting that the opposition chose to criticise this unit last year, seeing as it has been so successful in its outcomes. And the positive community response has reflected this. The people of Queensland need information and education, especially from a department like Emergency Services, where protecting and saving lives and properties is our major focus. If the opposition took time to read about its achievements, it might have more time to dedicate to more important issues affecting our community.

Firstly, I would like to give you a bit of background regarding the Community Engagement Unit. The DES established this unit in June 2001 in response to a commitment by the Queensland government and this department to improve opportunities for citizens and communities to participate in government policy, program and service delivery processes. The unit supports two of the government's key priorities—community engagement and a better quality of life and safer and more supportive communities—and broadly reflects the core principles of the Community Engagement Division of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet.

The Community Engagement Unit was established as the agency's first multi-divisional, cross-agency unit, and has a staff of six. The broad purpose of the unit is to foster a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to identifying and meeting the needs of communities across Queensland in relation to emergency services and community safety awareness and education. The unit has a number of specific objectives, which include enhancing community engagement practice; developing and promoting a more coordinated approach to the development and delivery of community safety initiatives; and promoting the development of efficient and inclusive models of service delivery responsive to the needs of communities.

As a result, there have been a number of community education programs developed to meet the needs of the population throughout the state. These have been recognised as a great success. I would like to outline some of the unit's key achievements. The first is the roll-out of the Community Safety Project. This project has been developed through a partnership between DES and the Queensland Police Service aimed at enhancing the capability of communities to prevent crime and improve personal and community safety. The project broadens the current crime prevention activities of Neighbourhood Watch to incorporate a wider focus on community safety, particularly in the home. The Community Safety Project differs from others in that the lead role is played by the community itself. This project is now being trialled in six Neighbourhood Watch communities across the state, including one in my electorate, as I found out just the other night.

The unit has been an active participant in the development of the Cairns based Indigenous Coordination Unit. This unit coordinates activities across the service aimed at identifying the needs of indigenous communities, improving service delivery and strengthening local capacity to build and sustain safer communities. Other initiatives include the Child Injury Prevention Project; the development of the Five-Year Plan for Safer and Healthier Murri and Islander Communities in North Queensland 2003-07; finalisation and publication of a Strategic Review of Local Ambulance Committees; and, finally, enhancing the practice of community engagement through the development of the department's Community Engagement Resource Kit. These initiatives and

projects have been well received in the communities they serve, and are examples of just how successful and vital the Community Engagement Unit has become.

**Mr SHINE:** The Minister for Emergency Services has often described the Queensland Ambulance Service as a world-class service. However, the real measure of the standard of service provision would be the community's response to how that service is provided. People in the community are well aware of the dedication and commitment of ambulance staff in this state, but like all service industries, there needs to be some monitor on how well the QAS is actually doing. Could the acting minister advise whether or not the Queensland community is satisfied with our Ambulance Service, and how this information came about?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** There is no doubt that Queensland Ambulance Service staff are doing a fantastic job, and the community is well aware of this. The people of Queensland have access to emergency pre-hospital treatment 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and we have some of the most dedicated and highly trained paramedics in the country. A national productivity report on emergency services has confirmed Queensland's ambulance officers are among the best in the country and their patients appreciate it. The Productivity Commission *Report on Government Services* found 98.3 percent of Queensland patients reported they were very satisfied or satisfied with their Ambulance Service. The result is one of the highest in Australia and represents a one per cent increase on the high figure of 97.3 per cent recorded last year. The satisfaction result is even more impressive given the number of cases that ambulance officers respond to each year.

In 2002 Queensland had the highest number of responses per capita, recording 15,352 per 100,000 people. Over that year ambulance officers responded to more than 558,000 calls for assistance, representing more than 1,500 calls every day. The 98.3 per cent public satisfaction rate is testament to the professionalism of ambulance staff and is a result that other private and public sector organisations can only dream about. Further evidence of the effectiveness of the QAS is provided by response times, which were among the best in Australia, with 50 per cent of incidents being responded to within eight minutes. The response result comes despite a 7.5 per cent increase in life threatening code 1 calls and a 26.6 per cent increase in code 2 calls. Overall, calls for assistance rose by around 11.7 per cent last financial year.

Patient satisfaction research has been developed through the establishment of national performance indicators, sponsored by the Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth-State Service Provision in conjunction with the Convention of Ambulance Authorities. Queensland has recorded the second highest percentage of customer service satisfaction, with Western Australia beating us by less than one per cent. The QAS also beat the national satisfaction average by almost two per cent, again proving the success of our service. However, these statistics would not be possible without the dedicated men and women who make up the Queensland Ambulance Service. I take this opportunity to recognise their effort, devotion and enthusiasm to saving and protecting the lives of many thousands of Queenslanders each year.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** We are all aware that Queensland is prone to natural disasters, such as fire, cyclones and flooding. Can you explain how the new State Planning Policy will benefit Queenslanders and contribute to the Beattie government's priority of safer and more supportive communities?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The Department of Emergency Services, in conjunction with the Department of Local Government and Planning, has prepared the State Planning Policy: Mitigating the Adverse Impacts of Flood, Bushfire and Landslide, known as the State Planning Policy. This policy has been formulated to help reduce the adverse impacts of flood, bushfire and landslide on people, property, and the ability for these natural hazards to become disasters. Between 1967 and 1999 natural disasters are estimated to have cost Queensland an average of \$239 million per year, based on 1999 values. This does not include the damage we cannot put a price on—including loss of life, injury, emotional trauma, environmental degradation and reduced productivity.

The State Planning Policy is designed to influence land use planning and development decisions to produce development and settlement patterns that are less vulnerable to flood, bushfire and landslide. The widespread support for the State Planning Policy from key interest groups, including the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Planning Institute of Australia, the Urban Development Institute of Australia and Emergency Management Australia, which comes under the Commonwealth government, indicates that both the broad direction and the detail are right. Community consultation on the draft State Planning Policy and guidelines

commenced on 19 October 2002 and closed on 13 December 2002. A total of 15 workshops were held throughout Queensland, with more than 335 people attending.

The responses to the community consultation were overwhelmingly supportive of the State Planning Policy. Cabinet has endorsed the intention of the Minister for Local Government and Planning to adopt the State Planning Policy, as required by the Integrated Planning Act 1997. Cabinet has also endorsed the intention to make some minor amendments to the Standard Building Regulation to achieve consistency and complementarity with the State Planning Policy. The fulfilment of the department's desire to achieve this State Planning Policy foreshadows a new era in reducing the future impact of floods, bushfires and landslides on Queensland communities.

The policy is the first in Queensland to ensure that bushfire hazard is adequately considered by local governments when making planning schemes and decisions on development applications. While a number of local governments have already addressed bushfire hazard management in their planning schemes as a duty of care to their communities, this new policy ensures a consistent approach across the state. While historically Queensland was not impacted by bushfires to the same degree as southern states and territories, proper planning and preparation processes had to be put in place.

Over the past few decades there have been a number of times bushfires have caused extensive damage to property, resulting in costly recovery for local communities. There has also been significant loss and damage which we cannot easily put a price on. This includes loss of life, injury, emotional trauma, environmental degradation and reduced productivity. The new policy will come into effect on 1 September and local governments and interested parties have the opportunity to become familiar with the policy and guidelines prior to it taking effect. The State Planning Policy and associated guidelines are available on the department's web site.

**Mr LEE:** Over the last decade ambulance and fire personnel have undergone a huge transformation. The training undertaken by these professionals now ensures that they have the highest-quality skills in order to protect the lives of Queenslanders. Could the minister explain how these advances in training have improved the safety of Queenslanders through professional service delivery?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Both the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service have experienced giant leaps forward in training and education during the past decade or so. The Professional Development Unit of the QFRS plays a pivotal role in maintaining the professionalism of Queensland firefighters. Its three key functions are to manage the QFRS Academy at the Port of Brisbane, to conduct training and to maintain the Registered Training Organisation status of the QFRS. This status provides the ability for the QFRS to issue nationally accredited qualifications to both staff and commercial clients. The PDU is one of the busiest training organisations in the country. It issues an average of 700 training certificates every week, which is over 30,000 per year. For the 10 months ended 30 April this year there were over 8,000 attendees at the academy.

The QAS also provides ongoing education for its paramedics to ensure the ongoing provision of the best possible ambulance services. This education is made up of a range of education programs, including in-house short courses, vocationally accredited courses, degree courses and access to postgraduate courses. The links with universities that have been previously forged continue to be strengthened and the latest group of intensive care paramedics commenced training in March 2003 in the newly developed Graduate Diploma in Health Science through QUT.

Today I would like to also remind the committee that the implementation of the CAC will result in the recruitment and training of an additional 110 ambulance staff. I might have mentioned that already today. These new paramedics have been recruited from regional areas of Queensland and will shortly commence both the theory and practical components of the Diploma of Paramedical Science (Ambulance) and Certificate IV in Ambulance Communications.

QAS is also committed to ensuring that staff have access to the most up-to-date training which reflects the varying demands placed on officers, both on the road, in communications centres and in management situations. This commitment is demonstrated by successfully extending the scope of the QAS's Registered Training Organisation status so the nationally accredited certificate and diploma courses can be offered under the QAS accreditation. The QAS has also redeveloped all clinical and communication officer training programs to comply with the national health training package.

The programs delivered by QAS to comply with recent changes to national guidelines have also been rewritten, which established an Australiawide standard for ambulance paramedic

education and ambulance communications officer education. The Management Continuing Education Program, which commenced in April this year, is equipping frontline managers with the necessary management skills that are specific to QAS.

The QAS Mentor Program has also been designed to enhance the educational skills of staff to assist students in regional and remote locations. The online campus package has been developed to provide an education database with enhanced reporting capabilities. This package will also progress to deliver online education, synchronous learning and online content delivery. The computer-aided dispatch training program has been reviewed and developed in line with new technology that is available.

**The CHAIR:** I direct your attention to the community ambulance cover consultation process. You would be aware of some accusations of the government not listening to the community in relation to the funding of the QAS. I understand that a long and comprehensive community engagement process took place prior to the CAC's introduction on 1 July. For the benefit of the committee, could you describe that process and the degree of consultation that took place in developing the new cover?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The Beattie government has taken great steps to ensure that the community has been listened to during the implementation of the CAC. Since the cover was announced last December, members of the community have been provided with a range of opportunities to provide input. This included the establishment of a CAC Implementation Unit, with representatives of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Treasury and the DES. This unit was established to answer questions posed by members of the community.

Over a number of months, the unit responded to more than 1,000 written inquiries from members of the public. Many of these were received by mail and email. The QAS Community Call Centre was also available to take calls from members of the community. In addition, the Queensland Ambulance web site provided the latest information on the cover, with a comprehensive list of questions and answers as well as a list of possible scenarios. This web site also provided the option for feedback to the implementation unit. As a result of the feedback, the government moved to ensure that the CAC would not impact unfairly on regional and rural Queensland by introducing an exemption for farming sheds and pumps.

Additionally, following representations and consultation with business, the government has agreed that, where a business is operating from a single premises but is in receipt of multiple accounts in the one name for the one business, the business will be liable for only one CAC levy only. In developing the CAC cover, the state government established an interdepartmental steering committee and liaised with a range of stakeholders including Commerce Queensland and the LGAQ. As a result, the legislation was changed to incorporate a range of exemptions. These include that single premises used for a single business or other non-residential activity will pay only one account, even when it receives more than one electricity bill; caravan park residents will not pay on sub-metered sites as parks will only pay on accounts held with electricity retailers; the farm shed and pump exemption has been widened to cover more primary producers, for example, silos and boat sheds used by commercial fishers will be exempt; church buildings and other places of worship will be exempt unless the electricity contract includes a commercial activity; and domestic water and sewage pumps are exempt.

Also, as a result of consultation we have modified and simplified administrative arrangements for on-suppliers such as home unit managers. Of course, the government will continue to listen to the community over the coming months as the CAC is implemented. We aim to address every concern raised and promote the results of the scheme as they come to fruition. I would like to remind those here today that the CAC is essential to maintaining the world-class service and facilities currently employed within the QAS.

**The CHAIR:** The committee will take a short break and will resume at 2.40 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 2.31 p.m. to 2.44 p.m.

**The CHAIR:** I declare the committee hearing reopened.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, in relation to the previous question I asked, I understand that the QFRS has undertaken testing of the QAS PremierCAD system a number of times—most recently in November of last year—and identified more than 185 potential issues and, therefore, has sought to discontinue the testing of the system. Minister, does that mean that that creates problems for the continued amalgamation of the com centres? Would you like to comment, particularly in relation to vehicle location maps and the RightCAD system as well? It is an overall question.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will give this over to either the commissioner for the QFRS or QAS.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** No, it does not create any problems for the continuing amalgamation of the centre at AFcom, in particular where that technology is used. Right throughout Queensland the Fire and Rescue Service uses another form of CAD system called FireCAD, and that is currently being upgraded at the moment to keep it operational into the future. During that period of testing of PremierCAD—we have used elements of PremierCAD for some time—I think it was mentioned earlier in a response that the department, along with the Queensland Police Service, had undertaken a feasibility study last year about the future needs of emergency service computer aided dispatch systems right across Queensland.

The next phase of that project is now getting under way with obviously the Department of Emergency Services—primarily meaning the fire service and the Ambulance Service—together with the Queensland Police Service. That will endeavour to seek out specifications. The most likely outcome is a common computer aided dispatch platform for all services in the future using the most current and up-to-date technology. In terms of the system that we currently use, it has no impediment on how we operate currently and we do not see any real change to that in the near future.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I accept the answer that Lee has given, but I also refer to a departmental briefing note—and I will table it for the minister if necessary—which indicates a number of options that I think the commissioner was referring to that have been considered by the department.

In order to finally develop some long-term vision in relation to AFcom and also the QAS centres, I note that the staff training and other associated costs have not yet been incorporated into the final costings of that review. Can you as the minister, or a spokesman for you, indicate some figures that you would actually incorporate into the costing of a combined or an upgraded com centre?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Just before I hand over to the commissioners, I just think that it is probably useful to place on record as Acting Minister that the questions that you are asking are very operational, which is why I am referring them to senior officers as appropriate.

**Mr MALONE:** I understand that.

**Mr Higgins:** The document that has been tabled refers to a review particularly of the structure where the AFcom ambulance-fire communications centre at Spring Hill has been a separate business unit of the department for the last several years since the combined CAD project was established a number of years ago. This document refers to a proposal to look at the reintegration of the ambulance and fire communications staff to align with the regions that that particular communications centre supports in terms of service delivery.

In effect, it will have no impact or change to the operational arrangements that will exist in the centre. The technology—for example, automatic vehicle location, mobile data terminals, et cetera—that is used in support of ambulance and fire operations on a daily basis will continue until such time as an alternative computer aided dispatch system is identified for use by all three emergency services, that is, fire, ambulance and police. So we do not anticipate any significant changes to our operations fundamentally until we look at an alternative computer aided dispatch system. But the commitment to a combined communications centre remains and the intention is to look at a platform that will meet the needs collectively of all of the emergency services.

**Mr MALONE:** This is probably just a quick question to round off that section. Has there been a competitive audit of the PremierCAD system that you are operational with now? Have you some figures that indicate the errors that take place, because I regularly get calls when ambulances have actually been sent to the wrong place or the wrong road? Is that an operational problem? Is that within the technology that you are using? Is it just simply because you have not got rural addressing or what other problems cause that?

**Mr Higgins:** That is a multifaceted problem. It can result from a number of issues. It is not simply a unifactorial issue. We have a number of occasions where that might result in an address being not properly identified. But it is generally not a systems problem; it is usually based on the information that is provided to the emergency services in the first instance if that address is incorrectly translated. In the main, in the last financial year the Queensland Ambulance Service dealt with nearly 600,000 cases and the error rate in terms of addresses is very small indeed. So we do not blame the system for any of those problems. Often it is a difficulty because of mobile communication, because of inaccessible locations and difficulty identifying where people are.

**Mr MALONE:** With reference to page 10 of the MPS—and I am talking about the QAS roster reform—I understand that under the new EB arrangements there have been significant changes to the staffing roster. I also understand that when compiling the new roster long service leave, et cetera, was not satisfactorily factored into the situation, leaving 75 unfilled paramedic vacancies in Brisbane alone at any one time. Can you confirm that or is there some other issue that you would like to comment on?

**Mr Higgins:** There are no significant vacancies in our Brisbane region for the Ambulance Service. In fact, the recently announced budget identifies an additional 32 positions to go to the Brisbane region. The new rosters that are designed for the Brisbane region—and indeed across the state—for the Queensland Ambulance Service do two things primarily: they specifically intend to align the resources available to the Queensland Ambulance Service to the demand profile of the community and ensure that our rostering practices are consistent with supporting the occupational health and wellbeing of our staff. So they are the primary motivations for the roster reform project.

We have allocated sufficient resources across the state, including the additional 110 paramedics, to ensure that rosters provide for basically a ratio of 80-20, which means that we have 20 per cent capacity to meet the needs of long service, annual leave, sick leave and other commitments, including training, to support our operations. That ratio has been identified and implemented in our new roster reform arrangements across the state. That is an ongoing project, of course, and our rosters will continue to be modified over the longer term to ensure that they remain aligned to the community's need for ambulance services.

**Mr MALONE:** Thank you, Commissioner. I am sure that the QAS staff will be pleased to hear that. I would just like to go on with an issue that actually identifies that area. The roster changes, as I said, have hit the Brisbane region particularly hard. I refer to a particular weekend as an example. On Saturday, 28 June at Sunnybank—and the minister would be well aware of that area—the Sunnybank station was closed completely and the remaining crew were deployed to Durack, leaving one crew to cover that entire area. On the following day, Sunday, Centenary was left with only a second-year student to man the station. Cleveland was also left with a single officer only. I understand that on that same Sunday evening, 29 June, the com centre received a call from a 37-year-old female with severe vomiting at a Fig Tree Pocket address. The call was received at 2042. However, a vehicle was not dispatched from Durack Ambulance Station until 2145—an hour later. The patient ended up cancelling the call at 2148, finding her own way to the hospital. Could you comment on that? Does the commissioner have some view on that or are there some extenuating circumstances why that might have happened? Perhaps you can explain why that might have happened.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not reflecting or suggesting that the question is inappropriate, but it is, I think, sufficiently detailed that we would be happy, if you allowed us, to take that on notice because of the particulars involved—which we will do—and get back to you.

**Mr MALONE:** I can give you a copy of the question, if that is appropriate.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I appreciate that.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I refer again to page 10 of the MPS and the roster system. Given that the recent roster reform changes meant that the overtime budget has been stretched—and I would like you to comment on that—can you give an estimation of the overtime budget for the last three years? Have you a figure that you actually worked to in the last three years and the budgeted overtime figure for this year?

**Mr Higgins:** We have a budgeted figure for overtime each year. That is distributed across the state to each region for their operational purposes. Essentially, the total budget for the last financial year for overtime was around \$10 million to \$11 million. I could give you a precise figure. The overtime budget for the QAS has been stretched over the last two years largely as a consequence of a significantly increasing demand for services. As the minister indicated on the record earlier, we have had substantial increases in demand for acute services in particular and we have not had significant increases in resources over the last two years. So our operational capacity has been stretched by demand increases. We anticipate that that will be resolved to some extent by the injection of additional resources in this financial year. That will enable us to roster resources to ensure that we are meeting the community's need for service.

In addition, the resources—the way that they are allocated and the roster reform changes—will allow us to better service the community demand profile. Traditionally, we have operated on, in our large volume areas, what are called 10-14 rosters—10-hour day shifts and 14-

hour night shifts, which provide precisely the same coverage for every hour of the day. Of course, ambulance demand patterns do not follow a consistent pattern across 24 hours of the day. We have revisited our roster arrangements to ensure that the resourcing is maximised when the demand for service is at its highest level. So those two projects—the additional resources and the roster reform arrangements—will enable us to ensure that we meet our demands for service within budget frameworks and reduce the pressure on overtime budgets.

**Mr MALONE:** Can you give me a figure for the budget for this year?

**Mr Higgins:** I will take that on notice and give you the precise figure allocated for overtime for the state.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Except that is going to jump around a bit as those new paramedics and additional staff come on line.

**Mr MALONE:** I need just a budgeted figure obviously. Note 1 on page 14 refers to the fire levy. I note that there has been a \$10 million increase in the fire levy in the past financial year. What is the estimated total increase in the fire levy forecast for this financial year? Given the level of that increase, in what areas do you propose to move the levy boundary? Can you give me an idea of the areas that you would move the levy boundary to raise those extra funds?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** There would be principally two reasons for that increase in revenue for the fire levy. As you are aware, Queensland is a growth state. Last year, our population increased by 80,000. Some 80,000 people moved to Queensland and now call Queensland home. They become levy payers. I am not suggesting that each of those individual 80,000 becomes levy payers, but they do when they set up house. You need only to look at the construction boom happening not just here in south-east Queensland but in a range of areas throughout the state to see that that obviously adds to the overall collection of revenue under the fire levy.

**Mr MALONE:** Possibly I did not make myself clear.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am getting to the second part. Obviously, that puts pressure on existing fire levy boundaries. As communities expand into formerly rural areas, there is a need to continually adjust fire levy boundaries to keep pace with that urban growth. In relation to specific examples I will hand over to the commissioner, who can perhaps provide you with those additional details.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** Each year, at about this time in fact—through July—I require each region to convene a meeting under the chairmanship of the local regional assistant commissioner, which incorporates the regional district inspectors and the rural regional inspectors, to have a look at their planning for the year ahead, as to what locations may be ready for a transfer, if you like, to the urban fire levy system in the forthcoming year. Those meetings are under way, so at this point we do not have the definitive list of areas that may make the transition from a rural fire district to an urban fire levy.

That process, under our code of practice 880.1, requires a significant business case approach, if you like. The needs of the rural brigades and the needs of the urban service delivery are taken into account and factored in. From that, a consultation process with the affected rural brigades and communities is undertaken before final decisions are made on recommendations to gazette new boundary areas. That is the sort of dynamic process that happens each year.

Within those meetings, which the regions will be conducting this month, they will also look out for the next, say, three to five years and have a look at subdivision growth in the region and different communities and start to make longer-term plans about whether areas are going to transition. We believe essentially that areas that receive the service of the urban fire service should pay for it.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, page 19 refers to counterdisaster and rescue services. I refer to pre-hearing question on notice No. 2, which refers to moneys raised by levies and charges. I note that there has been an almost \$500,000 increase in charges for CDRS for 2002-03, most particularly in medical evacuation and search and rescue. Has there been an increase in the charges for medical evacuation or search and rescue that can explain this dramatic increase in funding?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will ask Gary Taylor to provide you with that answer.

**Mr MALONE:** Considering that the volunteers basically would be involved in that, I would imagine so. I just need an overview of how those charges come about. It is quite an amount of money—\$500,000.

**Mr Taylor:** The increase in user charges revenue for CDRS is largely in the aviation services area. It is for transports that occur across the border, largely in the New South Wales area, and also when we are activated by the Commonwealth for evacuations and those types of things. The increase has been in line with previous levels of activity that have occurred in the natural disaster area.

**Mr MALONE:** So basically earned by the aviation wing?

**Mr Taylor:** Yes.

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

**Mr SHINE:** Page 34 of the MPS refers to the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. While I am on the subject of bushfires, I repeat remarks I made earlier in the House. I convey my appreciation, on behalf of the people of Toowoomba North, to the Fire and Rescue Service particularly but also to the QAS and the emergency services generally for the help that they were to our community last October.

The QFRS has pledged to contribute to and participate in the national Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, which was formed in response to the Christmas 2001 New South Wales bushfires. It is hoped the CRC will further research the incidence of bushfires and enhance community understanding of fire risk issues generally. Could the acting minister inform the committee about Queensland's contribution to the CRC and the benefits expected to flow from this participation?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Following the bushfires in New South Wales and the ACT during December 2001 and January 2002, the Commonwealth Minister for Science invited the Australasian Fire Authorities Council and CSIRO to jointly make a submission to the Commonwealth to establish a CRC. This CRC was formed to carry out research into a suite of issues relating to bushfires under the subprogram for funding CRCs. Participation by the Fire and Rescue Service will provide advancements in service delivery tools and techniques more cost effectively than could be obtained through isolated research and development that would otherwise be needed. The formation of the Bushfire CRC and the provision of Commonwealth funding was then announced by the Minister for Science in December last year.

The Bushfire CRC is a project that involves 28 participants from the university/research, government and fire agency sectors over a seven-year period, with a total contribution of \$101.5 million. The research program for the CRC constitutes 22 projects established under five core programs, which are: safe prevention, preparation and suppression; management of prescribed fires and wildfires in the landscape; community self-sufficiency for fire safety; protection of people and property; and education and training.

Staff from the participating agencies have been allocated to each of the research programs, and the programs have also been allocated a budget from the total resources available to the CRC. Funding arrangements for the CRC are as follows: total cash, both Commonwealth and participants, \$41.7 million; total in kind, \$59.8 million; and total resources available therefore \$101.5 million. The Commonwealth is contributing \$24.8 million over seven years. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service contribution over the seven-year period is \$1.4 million in cash and \$895,000 in kind.

A company limited by guarantee has been established to administer the CRC. The name of this company is Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre Limited. Queensland will participate by virtue of its membership of the company. The commissioner will be the departmental nominee to participate as a member of the company.

On 25 June this year Queensland Treasury advised that participation in the company by the department did not require approval under the terms of the Financial Administration and Audit Act. Queensland Treasury further advised that, given the research objectives and the number of organisations involved, the company structure chosen—a company limited by guarantee—was a suitable vehicle to operate the CRC and that the department's interests, having regard to the level of contribution, appeared to be appropriately protected by the provisions of the company constitution.

That means that Queensland is prepared to support this national approach to the tune of almost \$2 million over seven years. We believe that the proposed CRC and Queensland's participation have significant potential to enhance our Smart State objective as well as contribute to fire safety and fire management across Queensland. I am sure everyone would agree that this program would be a win-win for all concerned.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I understand that the Mackay-Whitsunday region is undergoing a complete transformation of its emergency services facilities. The member for Mackay and the member for Whitsunday have expressed their delight at the news that almost \$5 million will be spent upgrading emergency services in their electorates.

**Mr MALONE:** And the member for Mirani. It is in my electorate, too. **Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** This can only be good news for residents of and visitors to this popular tourist area. It will also be very good news for the member for Mirani, who must admit that the Beattie government delivers for all Queenslanders, not just those in Labor areas. Minister, can you please outline what these changes will entail and what the benefit to the community will be?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am shocked to find that the member for Woodridge is now accepting questions from the member for Mirani. I am pleased to say that the Mackay-Whitsunday region is set to benefit from a \$5 million emergency services package aimed at delivering the best possible emergency care for residents. This will represent a significant improvement in service delivery within this area. The package includes a multimillion dollar emergency services complex at Beaconsfield, a replacement ambulance station at Calen, relocation of the Mackay City Ambulance Station to South Mackay, consolidation of Mackay ambulance communication functions and a number of additional staff within the region.

The new complex, to be located on the corner of Holts and Beaconsfield roads, will be the first of its type in Queensland and will combine the services of the QAS, the QFRS, the Rural Fire Service and the CDRS. The idea came about when QAS and QFRS determined that the existing ambulance and fire stations in North Mackay were not sited for optimum service delivery to the Andergrove, Beaconsfield, Slade Point and northern beaches areas. These areas have seen significant population changes in recent years.

The project replaces the old North Mackay ambulance and fire stations—long overdue—and includes a joint operations and training centre, along with a joint workshop and store. The funding package will also see a replacement ambulance station constructed at Calen and the relocation of the Mackay City Ambulance Station to South Mackay.

These developments are aimed at improving emergency response times, boosting resources for our staff and providing better outcomes for the community. The emergency services package has also created the opportunity to consolidate the QAS communication function and provide additional on-road staff. The Mackay communications centre responsibilities will be transferred to Rockhampton, allowing the appointment of two additional on-road staff to boost Mackay's frontline ambulance service capability. It will mean a better delivery of services to a wider region, especially with the population spreading further across the Mackay-Whitsunday area.

The changes will be implemented during the next 12 months, after detailed consultation with stakeholders and the Mackay community. This project also presents an opportunity to realise economies of scale through the collocation of other elements of the Department of Emergency Services on the site, including the Rural Fire Service and CDRS district offices. I know that the member for Mirani will be very pleased at this news, as will the people and members of the Mackay-Whitsunday region.

**Mr LEE:** I congratulate the government on its plans to replace Queensland Rescue's Squirrel helicopter and its budget announcement of more funding for community helicopter providers. Could you please explain how Queensland Rescue and these community helicopter providers are being resourced to cope with increases in operating costs?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Thankyou for the question. CareFlight Queensland and the Sunshine Coast Helicopter Rescue Service are both well-established community helicopter providers, with over 20 years operational experience. The Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service and the Central Queensland Helicopter Rescue Service are relatively newer community helicopter providers. The Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service commenced operations in January 1996 and the central Queensland service commenced in September 1996.

The community helicopter providers have five-year service agreements with the state of Queensland through DES, effective from February 2002. The service agreements incorporate minimum operating and safety standards for community helicopter providers, and they also have financial and activity reporting requirements. The CHPs also work under an agreement to operate within a coordinated system of aeromedical tasking of aircraft by the QAS and clinical coordination by Queensland Health. The CHPs all perform a multifunctional role, including aeromedical operations, search and rescue operations, counterdisaster and support for urgent QFRS operations and urgent Queensland Police Service operations.

In 2002-03, the state government increased its minimum annual grant to community helicopter provider services from \$641,000, exclusive of GST, to \$852,000, exclusive of GST. The Sunshine Coast service receives an additional minimum annual grant of \$450,000 to support the continued provision of its emergency helicopter service in Bundaberg and for upgrading the helicopter to match the standard of other community based helicopter services in other regional centres. The government grant is currently paid quarterly in advance and is subject to compliance by CHPs with their obligations in the service agreement.

The calculation of increases in the annual government grant to CHPs is no longer determined by movements in the consumer price index. The current service agreements allow for an annual adjustment to the government grant, based on a formula that has been agreed to by the department and community helicopter providers. The formula was developed by officers of DES in consultation with Treasury officials and the providers themselves.

Implementation of this initiative will increase the minimum annual grant to community helicopter providers to \$871,000 exclusive of GST for 2003-04. The Sunshine Coast helicopter rescue service will receive an additional minimum annual grant of \$450,000 exclusive of GST for its Bundaberg service in 2003-04. The funding is part of an additional \$909,000 allocated over the next four financial years to assist the state's community helicopter providers. The community helicopter providers assist the Queensland government in striving for safer and more supportive communities and building Queensland's regions through provision of emergency services.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I want to be a little parochial for a moment and direct your attention to the Samford Valley First Responder group. I was proud to attend the launch of the valley's First Responder group recently in my electorate of Ferny Grove. The group has already played a major role in assisting the QAS and has attended a number of medical emergencies in the last few months.

I understand that Kenilworth in the Sunshine Coast hinterland was the first community to start a First Responder group and that the idea has gathered momentum around the state. I know the commissioner made reference to this briefly earlier this afternoon, but I ask the Acting Emergency Services Minister: could you advise how this innovative approach to saving lives not only benefits the Samford Valley community but many other communities throughout Queensland?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** This also provides me with an opportunity to provide some further information for the member for Mirani in relation to an earlier question. The Samford group, you are quite correct, is the fourth of its kind in the state and follows the success of groups in Kenilworth, Proston and Springsure. In fact, as part of further service enhancement, the First Responder trial will also be expanded to include Cherbourg and Imbil in addition to those areas that I just mentioned.

I am pleased to say that each and every one of these programs is an outstanding success and is treasured by the communities which they serve. It is through this initiative and the commitment and dedication of many volunteers that ambulance services in regional areas are being given an added boost. The Beattie government in its commitment to enhancing assistance to Queenslanders in need has supported the development of these community based groups throughout the state.

The aim of the First Responder program is to have a group of trained volunteers attend to the scene of a medical emergency and provide life support as well as scene stabilisation for the responding paramedic ambulance crew. These men and women are trained and equipped by the QAS to carry out basic life support, oxygen therapy and semiautomatic external defibrillation, and have undertaken many hours of practical exercises. They also use communications equipment provided by the QAS to enable dispatch but do not wear uniforms or transport patients.

I want to make it clear that the First Responder program does not replace a QAS response. There is a simultaneous dispatch of QAS paramedics by the communications centre at the same time as the First Responders is alerted. This ensures that residents and visitors to the area have immediate medical attention in an emergency. It is recognised that in many locations distance is the prime cause of longer response times by the QAS. In such situations, First Responders are a vital link in a continuum of emergency care.

Stakeholder consultations and interstate benchmarking are under way to inform the development of policy in this area. A First Responder concept like this one is not new. Other examples are Surf Life Saving and St John Ambulance First Aid, which provide a critical first link response at Queensland's beaches, the Brisbane Exhibition and major sporting events. I

congratulate all those who dedicate their time and skills to these kinds of groups. I did miss out one other location for the service which will be introduced this year in regional Queensland, and that is Blackbutt. Sorry, it exists now, I am informed.

**Mr SHINE:** Last year the Department of Emergency Services, through QFRS and QAS, received business excellence awards, and this year I understand that Counter Disaster and Rescue Services has also received a similar award. Could you inform us as to how this trifecta of business awards to these divisions and this department have come about?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am proud to say that the DES has completed a rare trifecta. The department's Counter Disaster and Rescue Services division won a finalist award at the Australian Business Excellence Awards presentation in Melbourne on 4 April. With the Queensland Ambulance Service and QFRS winning awards in previous years, the Department of Emergency Services has now achieved recognition in all its operational divisions. This is a rare achievement and is something the Department of Emergency Services can be justifiably proud of.

The award means that the ambulance, fire and counter-disaster services in Queensland are now all ranked among the most excellent businesses in Australia. Over the past five years in particular, the department has embarked on a range of initiatives designed to transform its performance and streamline and enhance the organisation. The intent is to achieve best practice management standards reflective of the department's world-class operational service delivery.

The Australian Business Excellence Awards, managed by Standards Australia International, are in their 15th year and encourage innovation, improvement and long-term success of organisations. Entering these awards was an opportunity for the department to showcase its achievements and receive recognition for the outstanding improvements and initiatives that have taken place in Counter Disaster and Rescue Services.

An exhaustive and comprehensive evaluation process took place over two days and involved visits by the evaluators to the state headquarters at Kedron Park, air bases at Townsville and Archerfield, and the Townsville and metropolitan district offices. The report from the evaluators will be an invaluable source of information for the division, with the results to be incorporated in this year's strategic plan.

It is the department's intention to build on the success in these awards and to develop strategies that will ensure the continuation of the department's provision of services in counter-disaster and rescue. This honour for our CDRS is well deserved and ranks the agency among the most excellent businesses in the country. DES is the only government department in Australia to have all its operational divisions achieve such recognition at the same time and even more remarkably to have earned the right to use the quality logo. It gives me great pleasure to say that these awards place the department in the company of the most well-respected public and private organisations in the country.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, I refer to the completion of the \$13 million Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Academy and hot fire training facility at the Port of Brisbane, which is a significant Smart State initiative. I must say I have visited this facility and it is most impressive.

The MPS states that the third and final stage of the academy has been completed and includes world-class training facilities which allow firefighters to experience realistic fire behaviours, such as backdraft and flashover, under safe conditions. Our Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Academy is regarded as the best in the Southern Hemisphere and is attracting interest from fire services in other states and internationally. Could the Acting Emergency Services Minister outline the value of this state-of-the-art training institution in both the training of our own firefighters and in attracting interstate and overseas students?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am more than happy to because, like you, I recently visited the centre in my role as Minister for Natural Resources and Mines during the recent oil spill that occurred at Lytton. I was just earlier today saying to the commissioner how impressive it looks. There is an outstanding issue about ministerial plaques, but we are working on that as time goes on.

The Professional Development Unit and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Academy have now been operating from the new site since the academy opened in October 2001. In this time, the demands for new training programs and the utilisation of the academy have both grown at a rate exceeding original predictions. The academy consists of two sites—the main campus, which includes a purpose built education centre and technical rescue training simulations, and the live fire campus consisting of a support building housing classrooms and storage areas and live simulations for the delivery of practical training in areas of structural, petrochemical and marine fires.

Now that the original construction of the academy was completed just last month, the focus will be on new initiatives for continuous development both in the current and future years. Project activities are currently aimed at providing supporting infrastructure for the expansion of systems and delivery of training within the academy.

The academy's newest feature is recognised as the world's best. It is an urban search and rescue training cell built at a cost of more than \$1 million and was opened last year. The cell has been another success story and features simulated living areas which have been buried under tonnes of rubble to simulate a building collapse. I am told this type of training cell mirrors as closely as possible the real life scenario that confronts rescuers in these situations. In fact, prior to this firefighters had to find almost demolition sites in which to conduct this kind of training, which was a bit slapdash in terms of a structured training program.

There has also been an expansion of office vehicle and equipment storage as the academy continues to grow. This expansion will continue to provide proper facilities for the housing of development and training staff, the delivery of training and the secure storage of operational vehicles and equipment. I think I was robbed a bit there.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time allocated to government members' questions having expired, I now call the member for Mirani.

**Mr MALONE:** How time flies when one enjoys oneself!

**Mr ROBERTSON:** It is true.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, I refer to question 1 on notice, and if you could have that placed in front of you I would appreciate it. For the benefit of Hansard, I will probably read the first part of it—

How many departmental employees are currently on leave with full pay for each of the following areas: stress related leave, study leave and those under investigation relating to disciplinary matters?

When the answer came back, I realised very quickly that most employees when they go on leave under those circumstances are not on full pay. I am sure you have the figures in front of you. Could you identify the number of employees who are currently on WorkCover or, alternatively, on salary maintenance and, more importantly, the two people who are on full pay on stress related leave who are currently listed in the answer to that question?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** You want those individuals identified?

**Mr MALONE:** No, I do not want to identify them. I want to know why those two particular people are not also on WorkCover or salary maintenance. They are on full pay.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sorry, I understand now.

**Mr MALONE:** But I do need to know the number of people who are currently on salary maintenance or in WorkCover situations within the department.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Sorry, for stress or right across-the-board?

**Mr MALONE:** Right across the department in every one of those areas—stress related, study leave or those under investigation, and they would either be on WorkCover or salary maintenance.

**Ms Smith:** As to the number of departmental employees who are currently on stress related leave, there are currently two QAS employees with WorkCover claims which are categorised as psychiatric or psychological injuries—those which could be stress related and who are currently on leave with full pay. Both of these employees have been on leave for more than six months.

There are no WorkCover records of employees on stress related leave for less than six months. There are, however, two other DES employees who have active WorkCover claims for psychiatric or psychological injuries who are not currently on leave with full pay but are on annual or special leave. It cannot be assumed that this leave is a direct result of their WorkCover claim. There are 26 DES employees who have active WorkCover claims for psychiatric or psychological injuries who may be on a return to work program as part of our normal rehabilitation process and who may or may not be receiving reimbursement for medical expenses. We have a number of officers, whether they be operational or Public Service, as part of the rehabilitation process who are moved on to alternative duties to relieve stress.

There are no departmental employees currently in the month of June on study leave with full pay at this time. Across DES 16 people took paid leave in 2003. There are currently two employees under investigation relating to disciplinary matters who are on leave with full pay to afford natural justice. One of these employees has been on leave for less than one month. The

other has been on leave for between one and six months. It is approximately six weeks, that one. There are currently seven people suspended on full pay awaiting the outcome of either an internal or an external investigation.

**Mr MALONE:** Through you, Minister, I ask: does that category cover salary maintenance as well? Are there any categories in salary maintenance?

**Ms Smith:** Yes, salary maintenance covers any disciplinary matters where an officer has not been deemed to be guilty. So, yes, there would be salary. Also, I suppose under WorkCover or even superannuation there is a component of salary maintenance.

**Mr MALONE:** Is it possible, through you, Minister, to identify numbers that would be in that category? They would not be picked up in the categories you have—

**Ms Smith:** Most of them would be picked up under these numbers, Mr Malone.

**Mr MALONE:** I refer now to question No. 2 that was on notice. I turn to the bottom of that page where the answers indicate the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service under aviation. I am looking at the second last line which indicates that in 2001-02 there was \$144,000 income. The estimated actual income for this year is \$212,000 and zero is budgeted for this coming year. Am I right in inferring that that has something to do with the replacement of Squirrel helicopter or can you explain the reasons for that?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will ask Gary Taylor to answer that for you.

**Mr Taylor:** I am sorry, I did not really understand the question.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The question is why is there a zero there.

**Mr MALONE:** That is a pretty good summary. We are on the same wave length anyway.

**Mr Taylor:** The aviation director is at the back here. He may have a better understanding of that than I have.

**Mr Robert Johnson:** I believe that relates to counterdisaster work, which we cannot predict.

**Mr MALONE:** So you assume we are not going to have any or is it the downgrading of the helicopter?

**Mr Robert Johnson:** No, we currently have a helicopter for counterdisaster work, the Squirrel, but we cannot predict the counterdisaster work that will come in next year.

**Mr MALONE:** Referring to question No. 4, which is quite detailed, towards the latter end of that summary of answers under the heading of the northern region there is a section about the QFRS and the charging for call-outs. I have to say that I have had a number of calls in relation to that where the QFRS has automatically turned out to accidents or whatever and have not only charged a cost towards the person who is involved in the accident, but in some cases where no blame can be attributed a bill has gone to both the parties in the accident. Can I get clarification on that because it is indicated that this is a problem area. Has that been sorted out or is there still a problem in relation to identifying where the bills go or if there should be a bill at all? In some cases the QFRS has not actually been called out. They have turned up to an accident, they were certainly not called by the people who were involved in the accident, and quite frequently it is to a very minor accident.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I will ask the Commissioner for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Services to respond.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** There is ongoing audit work into the area. Essentially the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has the ability under the act to charge for attendance at motor vehicle accidents. We do not charge for a motor vehicle accident where an extrication is performed. If we have to release somebody from a badly entrapped situation there is no fee for service. The fee for service goes to the people who receive the service. Basically it is hard to determine in terms of the concept of a no-fault approach in accidents, but we do distribute our costs. The assistant commissioner of the region also has the power to write that off and not proceed with the charge given that the level of service provided in some incidents is fairly minimal, apart from standby for a hazardous type situation. There is an internal working party within the department as a result of audit works which is closely examining a whole range of fees and charges for services but we are addressing it, yes.

**Mr MALONE:** For clarification, some of the bills that I have heard of are \$220. That seems to be a reasonably standard sort of charge. Does that compute with what has been indicated from that region or is it happening right across the state?

**Mr Lee Johnson:** Yes, it is. There is a standard approach and that is probably the standard charge for attendance at an incident. One of the issues for us is that this question arises where it is not the person who called for attendance—for example at a grass fire or a bushfire—it is the person who the service is delivered to who is required to pay. I think that is an issue that you are raising; that the owner of a motor vehicle, for example, might have been in a minor accident and has not actually directly called the fire service.

**Mr MALONE:** Yes, but gets a charge.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** Yes. Of course, our charges for attendance are claimable back through the individual's insurance policy as well.

**Mr MALONE:** Minister, on page 36 of the MPS is fire safety inspections. I understand that the majority of inspections in the last two years have been carried out on budget accommodation. What is the number of buildings of this nature on your register and how many times has each been inspected? Can you provide details of any incidents of non-compliance that have been revealed during these inspections?

**Mr Lee Johnson:** Could I just have the first part of the question again?

**Mr MALONE:** I am raising the issue of the number of buildings of this nature, low budget accommodation, and how many of those you have on the register and how many have been inspected and any details of non-compliance if you have a table of non-compliance.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** There is approximately 1,500 buildings of this nature across the state. They have been inspected several times since the tragedy at Childers. Since the new legislation came into force on 1 July of this year we have commenced a program right across the state. We are anticipating that that program could take anywhere from eight to 12 weeks or maybe even a little longer to complete. Our officers are in the field currently doing that. There is a level of non-compliance in some of the inspections to date, but a lot of those matters are relatively minor and will not result in a closure. We are actually trying to work with the owners and occupiers of those places to ensure that we do not go around with a hard approach and kick everybody out. By the same token we have to make sure that the buildings do comply with the new legislation. That work will continue over the next couple of months, but there are buildings we have found at this point in time that do not comply. Some of those will be issued with notices for immediate improvement. That will be ongoing. I do not have the exact figures with me at the moment, but as the weeks go on we will be able to report that in more detail.

**Mr MALONE:** Obviously the question is of a sensitive nature as we move towards a situation where those buildings will be condemned and people will be thrown out on the streets. That was the basis of the question. To continue on with that—

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Except to say that I am informed that based on what Lee was saying about the reasonable approach being taken by the QFRS—

**Mr MALONE:** And I understand that.

**Mr ROBERTSON:**—there are some individuals out there who have done nothing despite the years that have passed since Childers. There are other organisations that are trying to do the right thing, that have commenced the process and that are working cooperatively with QFRS, but there are still some individuals who have done nothing. I am not too sure how far one's patience should be stretched.

**Mr MALONE:** That was the basis of the question. I understand that for those who are trying to comply there should be some understanding by the department to help them get through that, but there will be others that do not. That is really what I was trying to find out.

In relation to false alarms, and that goes right across a lot of community organisations—nursing homes, hospitals et cetera—that have been faced with some fairly steep bills in terms of malfunction of equipment and problems with resetting et cetera, I am just wondering if the department has been able to work through that process. Some of those community organisations are run on a very tight budget and really cannot afford to be charged excessive amounts for technical problems. The QFRS cannot cover the cost of running backwards and forwards. Is the department getting an understanding and an ability to work with those people so that there is not an excessive charge being imposed on community organisations that are trying to do the right thing but because of technical failures with their equipment are being charged excessively?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am informed that the answer is yes, but I will let Lee provide the full answer.

**Mr Lee Johnson:** The service has actually undertaken a major project in the last 12 months or so to target a reduction in false alarms, but also through a range of stakeholders right across Queensland to target the buildings that are performing badly in particular. They are fairly easily targeted. The whole approach has been one of consultation and advice. We have prepared a fairly significant training package for all our staff and also for organisations like the Property Council and other people to show them exactly what are the sort of regular issues that crop up with false alarm systems and to how to ensure that they are maintained and are functioning properly. I think that project has won acclaim interstate. Other states are now copying the program and want to adopt our approach with it.

As I mentioned earlier about the charges for going to accidents, each regional assistant commissioner has the power of discretion to take into account the circumstances of community organisations, churches or others that may experience a spate of false alarms. There is a fair bit of work being done on that. We are more than hopeful that our targeted reduction in false alarms will occur over the next couple of years.

**Mr MALONE:** In estimates last year the minister gave an undertaking that he would investigate the issue of audits for drug stocks in QAS. However, according to advice received in a recent question on notice it appears that nothing much has changed. Can you, Minister, through your commissioner, give an account of the depth of that investigation or, indeed, advise if the investigation took place and perhaps even table the results?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** I am not too sure that that is actually the case. Nothing much has changed. It might have been the quality of the question but I am more than happy to have the commissioner answer that question because it is a serious matter that you raise.

**Mr Higgins:** For all purposes for the use of controlled substances and the drugs that we use in patient care, the QAS purchases, stores and dispenses dangerous drugs in compliance with the Health (Drugs and Poisons) Regulations 1996. To ensure that the drugs are used appropriately, and in response to the concerns that you raised last year, the QAS has undertaken a number of initiatives to ensure that our compliance with those regimes is first class.

The first thing that we ensure is that all drugs are kept in lockable containers and double locked whilst on stations. All drugs are accounted for and signed for at the beginning and end of each shift by paramedics. There is a comprehensive drug register to ensure that all drugs used during the course of our activities are properly recorded and they are audited a second time by a new process that we have undertaken through a business improvement review supported by our internal audit department within the Department of Emergency Services. So we now have a comprehensive regime to ensure that our compliance with the regulations is absolutely paramount. We also have a secondary regime to ensure that that is audited on an annual basis so that any discrepancies would be identified and problems would be overcome before they become major issues.

**Mr MALONE:** Have you done a report on that? Is it possible for that to be tabled?

**Mr Higgins:** In terms of the business improvement review, we have a comprehensive program which encapsulates all of the requirements of station auditing, which is not only for drugs, of course, and we can give you a copy of the business improvement review strategies.

**Mr MALONE:** That will save having to ask about it next year.

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Perhaps I could offer you, on behalf of the commissioner, a briefing along with that documentation on what they are doing.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time for non-government members' questions has expired. Can I take you to the role of local ambulance committees? As you might expect, I am familiar with the excellent work of the Grovely Local Ambulance Committee in my electorate. I would like to extend my congratulations to those community members on the committee for their dedication and support for the QAS. Many members of that committee in my electorate have spent years volunteering their time and effort, along with members of local area ambulance committees in many other areas of the state. Each has an important role to play, but my question is: could you advise how many such committees there are operating throughout the state, whether that number is growing, and the extent of the significant volunteer work that they contribute to the service?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** Firstly, can I acknowledge the dedication and determination of members of LACs right around the state. These people are an extremely important support element to QAS operations and encourage active community engagement. There are now 177 LACs throughout

Queensland, with Birdsville LAC constituted on 2 July last year and the Barcardine LAC in December 2002. I am pleased to say that membership of LACs is now in excess of 1,500. These men and women understand the importance of having a well equipped and highly trained ambulance service in their community.

Some have been members for many decades. Earlier this month, the Member for Gaven, Robert Poole, presented two members of the Woodridge-Springwood LAC with a certificate of appreciation and service bar for 30 years of service. Claire and Danny Daniels have dedicated more than 60 years of service to ambulance services in this state. It is examples like this one which highlight just how important the Ambulance Service is to the community.

The LACs have many roles, but one of their main ones in the past was fundraising. In the 2001-02 financial year, \$760,000 was provided by LACs, with an estimated \$748,000 for 2002-03. In addition, LACs continue to purchase and donate patient care equipment, which results in a saving of nearly \$1 million to the QAS budget each year. Some LACs were also successful in obtaining grants from the Gambling Community Benefit Fund. But they are also responsible for providing essential feedback and information generated within the community and acting as liaisons between the QAS and local residents. LACs submit information that helps the QAS decide where to build new stations and where to renovate. They point out areas needing a larger service delivery and provide information on how current services could be improved. Even with the introduction of the community ambulance cover and the secure funding base that will bring with it, LACs will continue to have a very important role.

A review of LACs was initiated in 2002 to examine a wide range of issues, opportunities for improvement and recommendations to assist LACs to reach their full and individual potential. The review recognised the current challenges facing QAS and the need for LACs and QAS to adjust to meet the changing organisational circumstances and to address community expectations. This report provides practical and realistic recommendations to achieve these improvements, with some already being implemented. LACs are an integral part of the QAS and its success as a world-class organisation. I look forward to seeing the results of this review in the future.

**Mr LEE:** I am aware that the Department of Emergency Services over the past few years has been broadening its focus from one of simply response and instead is taking a holistic approach to community safety and prevention initiatives. I understand members of the community are also being encouraged to become more aware of taking responsibility for their own safety. Can you advise how the department has gone about changing this focus?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The Queensland government is committed to creating safer and more supportive communities, and to achieve this goal interagency, community based partnerships are required. Consequently, the Department of Emergency Services is currently undertaking two initiatives in partnership with a range of other agencies and community organisations. These are aimed at delivering joint services and targeted interventions within selected communities. These initiatives are designed to both increase awareness and improve safe community practices. Both involve agencies working smarter by working together with key private sector stakeholders, local government and community groups.

Perhaps I can elaborate on a couple of these projects. The first is the Child Injury Prevention Project. This is the result of successful partnerships between relevant government agencies and Queensland Health aimed at fostering innovative and leading edge injury intervention strategies in two pilot communities—Mount Isa and Mackay. The aim of this project is to reduce the high incidence of injury in children aged up to four years over a three-year period in these rural communities to rates commensurate with urban areas.

Research has found that rates of injury in children in this age group in Mackay and Mount Isa were unacceptably high, especially when compared, for example, with rates among children in the South Brisbane area. The project has specific goals to reduce the rate of falls, poisonings, burns and drownings in children aged up to four in regional and remote areas. Strategies include raising the awareness of parents and carers of the preventability of child injury, and reducing hazards in the home. The project aims to pilot and evaluate a range of interventions that successfully reduce the incidence of child injuries, particularly in rural and regional areas of Queensland.

The second initiative is the Community Safety Project, which I mentioned earlier. In this project, the DES and the Queensland Police Service are working in collaboration to broaden the focus of the existing Neighbourhood Watch crime prevention program to incorporate the community safety initiatives of this agency. This project involved the DES working closely with police and Neighbourhood Watches in three Queensland communities—Mackay, Maryborough

and Camp Hill in Brisbane—from March to May last year to increase the level of community safety in those communities. Following the success of the pilot, the project has been rolled out into another six Neighbourhood Watch communities for a 12-month period this year. These communities are Kirwan North, Riverview, Toowoomba, Upper Mount Gravatt, Logan Central and Edmonton.

The project differs from others in that the lead role is played by the community itself. Once the focus was on crime alone, but now the Community Safety Project has introduced vital lifesaving strategies which have resulted from the DES involvement. These include teaching more people CPR, the importance of smoke alarms, how to prepare for a cyclone and how to minimise the risk of injury to children. Together with the Queensland Police Service and the Neighbourhood Watch program residents will be encouraged to develop skills to help protect themselves and their families. These initiatives can only add to the department's holistic focus and help reduce the incidence of death and injury in the community.

**Mr SHINE:** The rural fire brigade in my electorate has received an appliance under the Veteran Vehicle Replacement Program. I understand that at about this time last year the Beattie government handed over the 500th rural fire brigade vehicle to be commissioned for brigades around the state. This means that more than half of the Rural Fire Service's 900-strong fire vehicle fleet is now less than six years old. This is an excellent benchmark and puts the previous coalition government's efforts in this vital area of firefighting to shame. Can the acting minister expand on this excellent initiative and explain to the committee how it continues to improve the firefighting capability of our rural fire volunteers?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The budget allocation, as I have mentioned earlier, for 2003-04 will include 52 new Rural Fire Service appliances and an additional up to 30 new fire trailers. By the end of this financial year, we will have provided some 600 new or refurbished urban and rural fire units since we came into office. The member for Toowoomba North is indeed correct in his statement that the 500th Rural Fire Service truck was delivered at about this time last year—as I understand it, in around June. The Premier himself handed over the keys to the Daintree brigade for a brand-new state-of-the-art fire truck. It was among four new rural fire vehicles commissioned by the Premier and the Emergency Services Minister at a ceremony during the community cabinet meeting in Cairns.

The continuing vehicle replacement program has reduced the age of Queensland's rural fire fleet, and more than half of the state's 900-strong rural fire fleet is now less than six years old. Rural fire trucks delivered under the program have been designed and developed with close consultation of volunteers to meet the various needs of brigades in different parts of the state. The quality of these Queensland-built vehicles has been recognised over the years when our fire crews travel interstate to assist fellow firefighters. The light and medium fire response four-wheel-drive appliances manufactured for the RFS have been designed in consultation with the Rural Fire Brigade Association of Queensland to be compatible with units operated by other rural brigades. These appliances also have the capacity to connect to urban appliances, fire hydrants and rural water tanks.

The medium response vehicles deployed to New South Wales, Victoria and Canberra early this year proved their capabilities very favourably compared to the large tankers operated by other interstate rural fire services. A regionally based Queensland company—AAA Engineering Technologies of Crows Nest—constructs these rural fire brigade appliances and trailers. This company is now exporting similar medium response based fire appliances to New Zealand for use by that country's fire services.

As of 30 June this year there were just 144 fire appliances, or just 15 per cent of the total RFS appliance fleet, over the age of 20 years. In January 2000, the QFRS was made aware of the need to comply with the National Road Transport Reform Agenda, which meant that all rural fire brigade appliances may be required to be registered and therefore pass the standard safety inspection. Although no firm date for registration has yet been set, it is acknowledged that, at some stage in the future, there may be a requirement for rural fire brigade appliances to be registered.

The RFS continues to work with the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland to ensure that older vehicles are replaced and that brigades remove them from service. Under current budgetary assumptions and economic conditions, by December 2005 there should be no rural fire brigade vehicle older than 20 years of age, except in cases where, as I mentioned previously, a veteran vehicle has a current roadworthy certificate. This is indeed a remarkable achievement and turnaround.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, I refer to your response to the question on notice regarding terrorism threats. While there is no immediate indication that Queensland is a target for terrorist attacks, the community needs to be reassured that the government is prepared should such an event occur. Could you please expand on how the Department of Emergency Services is preparing for chemical, biological, radiological, incendiary and explosive responses and how these initiatives will help the community both in the planning for and in the aftermath of a chemical, biological, radiological or terrorist incident?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** The DES plays a key role in managing the consequences of large-scale emergencies, including the response to chemical, biological and radiological, or CBR, incidents. Since before the 2000 Olympics, the Queensland government has been developing its capability to deal with terrorist related incidents, including the capacity of agencies to respond to the use or threatened use of CBR agents. Key agencies which would be involved in a response to a CBR incident are the Queensland Police Service, the DES and Queensland Health. Agencies have been working in a collaborative manner in reviewing strategic and operational plans to ensure effective response and coordination during an incident.

The Queensland Disaster Management System would also coordinate a whole-of-government response during the recovery from such incidents. Within the department, there has been an increase in the training provided to individuals focusing on the skills, equipment and coordination arrangements required during a CBR response. All training is undertaken within the context of a multi-agency response to CBR incidents. Personal protective equipment has been assessed for its appropriateness to CBR agents and additional PPE is being purchased where required. The department is establishing a Special Operations Group comprising specialist staff involved in hazardous material incidents and technical rescue.

The establishment of this group will enhance operational readiness, management and response to a wide range of rescue situations and to chemical, biological and radiological incidents. The Queensland Ambulance Service has established a Major Events and Mass Casualty Planning Unit, which has been reviewing and developing procedures for ambulance support to CBR and other terrorist incidents.

New equipment purchased by the QFRS and the Chemical Hazards and Emergency Management Unit has increased the state's ability to detect and analyse suspicious substances. There has been an increase in sample retrieval capability provided to QFRS responders and additional detection and monitoring equipment purchased for use at an incident site. Protocols are continuing to be developed within Queensland Health to enable efficient off-site analysis.

The QAS is also increasing its training for clinicians in the specific requirements of a CBR response. The department has participated in numerous readiness exercises, including two significant operational exercises at Whyte Island and Exercise August Moon, a counter-terrorism exercise involving Police, Emergency Services and Australian Defence Force personnel. In coming months amendments to various related acts will be made through the Chemical, Biological and Radiological Emergency Powers Amendment Bill 2003. These amendments will ensure operational efficiency and provide certainty to emergency services officers operating under extreme circumstances.

**Mr LEE:** I am aware that the Department of Emergency Services is involved in specific initiatives which target Cape York communities that are in need. The Cape York Justice Study is one of these initiatives that has received positive outcomes for residents and visitors to the remote areas in the far north of our state. Can you advise the outcomes of the study and outline other initiatives which target the far north of our state and how they have made the communities which they target safer?

**Mr ROBERTSON:** DES is developing and implementing a number of specific long-term strategies which are in line with the goals of the Cape York Justice Study. The indigenous Australian service delivery enhancement package provides \$2.1 million over four years and continues the commitment of the Queensland government to achieving safer and more supportive communities. This package highlights the department's commitment and produces a number of initiatives such as the contribution to a new youth development program in Cape York and the Torres Strait; piloting a joint Emergency Services-EPA rescue unit in Cape York; the development of a disaster risk management guide for indigenous communities; the establishment of a Cape York and Torres Strait UHF two-way radio network for all emergency service volunteers; the provision of first aid and emergency response equipment to rural and remote communities and out-stations; the establishment of QAS field officer positions at Coen, Kowanyama and Horn Island; the appointment of two indigenous ambulance attendants on Palm Island; and the

establishment of SES cadet units in Weipa, Napranum, Mornington Island and Palm Island. Through this package first aid kits have been placed at many of the larger communities and out-stations and first aid courses have been conducted at many of the communities on Cape York Peninsula.

Other initiatives include the Strategic Plan for Indigenous Australians 2001-2005, which enhances the ability of DES to deliver culturally responsive emergency services to indigenous Australian communities; Government Champions, a successful whole-of-government initiative that promotes more effective relationships between government, community leaders and communities—the Director-General of DES is the Government Champion for the Cape York community of Coen—and the DES Indigenous Coordination Unit, officially opened in May this year. This unit coordinates activities across the agency aimed at identifying the needs of indigenous communities, improving service delivery and strengthening local capacity to build and sustain safer communities.

Over the next seven years the DES will be implementing a number of programs and strategies that will benefit residents in the remote areas of Queensland. The initiatives outlined are just the tip of the iceberg and the department will be working closely with other government agencies to ensure that the needs of this very important group of people are met.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates for the Minister for Emergency Services and Minister Assisting the Premier in North Queensland has expired. I thank the acting minister and portfolio officers for their attendance. Before you leave I remind you that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard web site within two hours from now. This hearing is now suspended until 4.15 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 4.03 p.m. to 4.15 p.m.

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

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

**Police Service**

Mr R. Atkinson, Police Commissioner  
Mr D. Conder, Deputy Chief Executive (Operations)  
Mr R. Warry, Deputy Chief Executive (Resource Management)  
Mr J. Just, Director of Finance  
Mr D. Melville, Assistant Commissioner  
Mr B. May, Principal Policy Officer

**Corrective Services**

Mr P. Rule, Director-General (Acting)  
Ms E. Davidson, Deputy Director-General (Acting)  
Mr R. Pulsford, Director, Finance and Administrative Services (Acting)  
Ms R. Kurjan, Principal Project Officer  
Ms G. Sinclair, Executive Director, Policy and Services Program

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**The CHAIR:** Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. The next portfolio to be examined is that of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province.

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

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province to be open for examination. The question before the Chair is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

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

**Mr McGRADY:** The 2003-04 state budget is an excellent one for both the Police Service and the Department of Corrective Services, with both receiving increases in their funding. From a big picture point of view, I am pleased to say that Commonwealth reports released this year placed Queensland amongst the best states in Australia when it comes to reductions in crime and escape rates from secure prisons. There are arguably fewer better measures of the success of this government in Police and Corrective Services than these two statistics.

In relation to Police this year, we posted our first ever billion-dollar budget. In this financial year it will be boosted by \$84 million, or a 9.2 per cent increase. The capital budget will also be increased by \$5.3 million, or a 5.6 per cent increase to \$99.4 million. It is the sixth successive record Police budget under our government. Expenditure on policing in Queensland is now almost as large as the entire Brisbane City Council budget. Our policies are also working, with many crime levels in Queensland now at their lowest reported levels in more than a decade.

We hope to continue this success through the initiatives of this budget, which include increased police numbers by about 300 so police numbers will swell to about 8,700 by the end of this financial year; establishing five more tactical crime squads at Redcliffe, north Brisbane, Oxley, Wide Bay and half a squad at Mount Isa; building new Police Beat shopfronts at Aspley, Buderim and Kawana Waters and a new Police Beat at Pioneer in the north-west; spending \$15 million to

improve information technology, to help reduce paperwork and free up police officers for work out on the beat; funding six additional staff to the State Flying Squad and spending \$32.2 million progressing important infrastructure projects such as Mundingburra, Toowoomba and Mackay North.

During 2002-03 we have also introduced new legislation to give effect to new uniform national hand gun laws and enhanced road safety through the new anti-hooning legislation. The anti-hooning laws give authorities the power to confiscate vehicles for 48 hours after the first offence, up to three months after a second offence and provide for possible forfeiture after the third offence. I am pleased to report that these laws have proven to be very successful and have been well received by communities right across the state.

In relation to the Corrective Services budget, this year we will spend \$397 million, an increase of \$3 million. The funding allocated to capital works is \$23 million. Highlights of this budget include \$2.6 million to continue the drug court trials project; \$1.7 million for the continuation of the expanded urinalysis drug testing program across the state; upgrading Community Corrections area offices at Emerald, Smithfield and Roma; remodelling of sex offender programs into smaller components so that the various sections of the programs can be completed at the most appropriate time during a prisoner's sentence; and completion of a new offender management system.

This budget is an excellent one for both Police and Corrective Services and I commend it to the estimates committee.

**The CHAIR:** The first session will be for questions from non-government members.

**Mr JOHNSON:** My first question is in relation to the Police and Corrective Services estimates. I refer you to page 1-21 of the MPS under 'Recent achievements', which notes the work of the State Drug Investigation Group with the Queensland Amphetamine Strategy Committee and Prescription Drug Abuse and Fraud Working Group. You would remember comments made by Brisbane's recently retired Lord Mayor Jim Soorley in early 2002 that some 70 per cent to 80 per cent of Brisbane's nightclubbers were using ecstasy. In response to these figures and a question asked of you in parliament on 11 April 2002 you responded by saying that 'we—that is you and your government—are doing what we can'. How many arrests were made in Queensland nightclubs for possession of these dangerous drugs during 2002-03?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. As he and the rest of the committee would know, since I have been in this portfolio—and certainly before then—I have become, if you like, a born-again anti-drug crusader. I say that not to try to make myself look good in front of this committee, but as both Minister for Police and Corrective Services I see on a daily basis the damage which drugs are doing to our society. When you consider that almost 75 per cent of people inside the Queensland prison system are there because of drug related crime you get some idea of the menace this is, not just to the people themselves who are caught up in the drug culture but also to other people who are the victims of crime as a result of the activities of these people who are merchants of death—the ones who peddle this filth in our community.

Last year I went to Thailand and some other Asian places to see at first hand the real problems facing the communities over there. I said in the parliament, 'If you think it's bad here, you ain't seen nothing yet', because in the capital of Thailand, Bangkok, there is a new organisation under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister which employs 760 people and they are just simply there to look at policies—not the policing of it—to try to find some answers to this terrible, terrible problem.

With regards to coming back here and the various nightclubs, I have seen the video on the television where people walked into clubs and pubs and actually secured drugs. I have to say that the version that we see on the television was somewhat different from the story that was told to me by the police. However, that is the point. The point is that we have this squad going around trying to stop the sale of these illicit drugs in the various clubs. An additional 14 per cent of drug offenders have been caught or charged. Last year there were 29,862. This year there were 33,901 which, as I said, was a 14 per cent increase. I do not have the figures on me as to the various nightclubs in the city, but that is the overall position with regards to drugs. If anybody can come forward with some initiative that is going to reduce the amount of drugs in our society they have my 100 per cent support.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I take on board your response to the question, although you have not really identified how many arrests. Can you provide details or advise the committee how many raids were carried out by the Queensland Police Service on nightclubs during the period 2002-03?

**Mr McGRADY:** We do not really have that breakdown of the exact numbers. I can say that it is an issue. Drugs is taken seriously by the police department and, I am sure, most members of society. We have the Drug Squad, as you know, in the state. This investigation group investigates major and organised drug related offences that occur across regional, interstate and, in some cases, international boundaries. The group also provides assistance to those regional police officers around the state.

The State Drug Investigation Group has an approved strength of 60 officers and seven staff members. The south-east Asian task force within the State Drug Investigation Group investigates major and organised crime within the Asian community. This group also assists regions in the investigation of large-scale illicit cannabis production grown both hydroponically and through commercial means.

A further component of the group is the Illicit Laboratory Investigation Team. This team comprises investigators and the Chemical Diversion Desk which, through industry liaison, seeks to identify persons acquiring chemicals used in the illicit manufacture of drugs. Due to the ongoing proactive policing by this team, the number of illicit amphetamine laboratories detected in Queensland simply continues to increase. In the 2001-02 financial year 143 labs were detected in Queensland compared with the detection of 151 labs between 1 July 2002 and 15 June 2003. The State Drug Investigation Group has also been involved in 21 covert operations and 31 overt operations that have resulted in the arrest of 606 persons and 1,774 drug and other criminal charges.

So, Mr Johnson, you can appreciate that it is very, very difficult to tell you exactly how many arrests have been made in the pubs or clubs of Brisbane. What I have tried to do here this afternoon is to give you an idea that drug enforcement is a priority of the Queensland Police Service. Let me say this: if it was not—but it is—you would certainly have me on their backs. As I say to you, I visit the prisons and I have given you a standing invitation to come to all or any of the prisons to see at first hand the results of this drug culture. If anybody says to me that taking drugs is smart, they are a fool. As I keep on repeating, I see at first hand the dangers and the damage which drugs do to our young people in particular.

**Mr JOHNSON:** What funding for targeted responses have you budgeted for in 2003-04 for responding to the dangerous threat that drugs in nightclubs continue to pose to our youth? Will this be threatened by cuts of over \$600,000 to the State Drug Investigative Group since 2000, which by the way does have an allocated budget despite your previous response in parliament? I note that information obtained from an FOI response this year revealed that \$675,000 had been slashed from the budget of the State Drug Investigative Group since 2000-01.

**Mr McGRADY:** The drug squad has an allocation this financial year of \$5.32 million as opposed to a budget last year of \$5.19 million. So if that is a reduction, I must go back to school.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am going back to this statement here from your department.

**Mr McGRADY:** I do not want to get involved in a controversy over this, but the facts are that in the budget this year there is an allocation for the drug squad of \$5.3 million. Last year we spent \$5.19 million out of a budget of \$5.19 million. What I will do now, though, is ask the head of finance of the Queensland Police Service, John Just, to go through this with you, because there has been a number of allegations made by the opposition that there has been a reduction in funding in the Queensland Police Service. It is not true, because you are not judging apples with apples. There have been changes; there have been funds moved from one area to another. You simply cannot pick up a piece of paper and say that there has been a reduction. There has not been a reduction. Let me reiterate that the Queensland Police Service received an increase of 9.2 per cent this budget for operational purposes. So there has not been a decrease in the allocation to the drug squad.

**Mr JOHNSON:** So this information here is false as of 2 January?

**Mr McGRADY:** I cannot honestly recall what piece of paper you are flipping around.

**Mr JOHNSON:** It is the state drug investigation—

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Just will assist me in answering the question.

**Mr Just:** The two outputs that refer to drug investigations in the Queensland Police Service are crime detection and the other one is combating major and organised crime. Crime detection has increased from 2002-03 to 2003-04 by \$10.166 million, which is a growth of five per cent, and combating major and organised crime has increased by \$25 million, which is an increase of 11.7 per cent over last year. So both the major areas that handle drug detection, which is

handled by the State Crime Operations Command, have had an increase. Every area of the Queensland Police Service this year has had an increase in their budget allocation.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Thank you. Minister, can you confirm your plans on cutting the plant and equipment budget down from \$50,523,000 in 2002-03 to \$50,505,000 in 2003-04 on page 1-47 of the MPS when there will be an additional 300 police officers on the street this year who need cars and radios?

**Mr McGRADY:** The service's plant and equipment acquisitions for this year have been identified at \$50.05 million. The most significant component associated with plant and equipment is the acquisition of new and replacement motor vehicles with \$31.8 million being identified for this purpose in this current budget. This figure relates to the total amount of money spent on purchasing new motor vehicles. It is important to recognise that the service also gets considerable revenue from the sale of vehicles when they are trading them in.

In this current year, it is estimated that proceeds from motor vehicle sales will be about \$27.5 million. This means that the net motor vehicle replacement cost for the service in this current financial year is around about \$4.3 million. The service has made provision in the capital budget to meet these costs. In terms of other items of interest such as communications, we are going to spend \$6.03 million, and that has been provided. So again, the police department decides how many vehicles it requires, how much plant and equipment it requires and budgets accordingly. Commissioner, would you like to add to that answer?

**Mr Atkinson:** I think that this is obviously a significant issue for a police department the size of the Queensland Police Service. I have actually been heartened by the development over recent years in terms of new stations that have come on line. I think that our equipment levels are considerably advanced on where they were in that post-Fitzgerald era. In fact, I think when you consider the Queensland Police Service as to where it was in the beginning of 1987 before Fitzgerald and where we are now some 15 years later, I think that the organisation is essentially unrecognisable. It has come ahead in leaps and bounds really. When I think back to that time at the beginning of 1987 as to where we were with buildings, plant and equipment and our level of professionalism and, I think, credibility with the community, too, then I think that there is absolutely no recognition between the organisation now and as it was then.

The service has a significant forward plan in terms of where we are headed. There are a number of major projects that are planned for this current financial year. I think that, really, we are in pretty good shape, quite frankly. Obviously, given the size of the organisation, that does need to continue, of course.

**Mr McGRADY:** Can I just point out to you that, if there is a shortage of funds for any plant or equipment, we have the mid-year review where I could go along and seek additional money if that was the case. But quite honestly, we do our budget, we believe that what we are budgeting for is sufficient to meet the requirements of the Police Service and I am quite comfortable with the amount of money that we have budgeted for.

**Mr JOHNSON:** When can we expect a complete upgrade of the academy at Oxley, given that you are constantly touting the Queensland Police Service as one of the best in the world? Why do you not give them world-class training facilities and upgrade the academy?

**Mr McGRADY:** I know that your question refers to the Oxley academy, and I will come to that, but one of the successes—and you would be interested in this, too—of my term as minister has been the changes that we have made to the north Queensland academy. We have this magnificent block of land overlooking the bay and we have the north Queensland academy. But we had problems with the accommodation.

**Mr JOHNSON:** We picked a good site for it, did we not?

**Mr McGRADY:** You picked a good site, but I will tell you the story of this. It is an interesting story.

**Mr JOHNSON:** You support this academy in Townsville, do you?

**Mr McGRADY:** I do.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Good on you.

**Mr McGRADY:** The local Catholic priest in Mount Isa, who is also a police chaplain, came to me with an advertisement for a motel that was for sale in Townsville. He said to me, 'This would make an ideal place for the recruits to live while they are doing their training.' So with divine providence, we went ahead and bought the hotel, Bessell Lodge, which is proving to be not only

a good accommodation home for the recruits but also when police officers from the north or the north-west go—and I hope Merri Rose is not listening to me here—down to Townsville, they do not have to go to hotels; they can stay at the lodge. A lot of conferences are held there and other activities. So there has been a major saving there. We are also working in the north of the state as well. It depends on how long I am in this job for, but my eventual aim is to sell off the academy, sell off the hotel and build a purpose-built one in Townsville. I do not know how long that is going to take—and the commissioner is raising his eyebrows—but that is what I want to see happen in the north.

The one at Oxley which you refer to is a massive project. I understand that we are spending half a million dollars this year on maintenance as well. So it is about \$1 million altogether on the academy. From time to time people come along with suggestions. It is all about priorities; it is all about how you use the resources that you have available to you. From the government's point of view, we have had a 9.2 per cent increase in our budget this year and \$1 million will be spent on the Oxley academy both on maintenance and also on other improvements.

**Mr JOHNSON:** How much?

**Mr McGRADY:** One million dollars. There is half a million dollars on maintenance and half a million dollars on providing some structures there. So altogether there is about \$1 million.

**Mr JOHNSON:** In reply to my question on notice No. 4 for estimates you referred to the capital upgrade program to improve conditions at that facility. A capital upgrade program implies a capital improvement, not a number of interim and temporary measures such as demountable classroom blocks, of which four planned for 2002-03 are suffering from delays. What level of funding has been spent on renovations of the existing teaching and office areas within the facility by your government? Can you advise the committee what has been refurbished? You have made mention of the \$1 million, but can you tell us what has been refurbished?

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes. I do not have that information. What I would say to you is that in this budget here there is half a million dollars for maintenance; there is half a million dollars for several additional teaching blocks and two amenity blocks. These buildings will obviously improve office accommodation for the staff and will allow four antiquated transportable buildings to be vacated. So there is a change. In terms of the question about how much has been spent on the academy since our government came into office, I do not have those figures, but Mr Warry can get those figures for me at short notice, I understand.

**Mr Warry:** What we would have to do is retrace the patterns of expenditure over the years in question and assign them to the particular elements of the program. We could do that for you if that was your wish. Could I just make the observation that one of the difficulties with the academy at Oxley is that it is, in fact, running at full capacity. What we have been endeavouring to do is to replace some of the older inadequate temporary facilities with new, functional facilities. While they are still relocatable, they offer a standard of accommodation that is quite acceptable. The beauty of them is that we can shift them around the campus site as we move further down the redevelopment program.

We are hopeful in the next year that we will, in fact, be able to turn our attention to the main fabric of the academy, which goes back to about 1970 or 1972 and actually start to refurbish that in total. That will mean that we are using additional spaces to free those up. But, as I said, the academy is running at full capacity and that presents a problem.

**Mr McGRADY:** It is a magnificent problem to have, because it means that not only are we having the 300 additional police but also we have additional trainees to take over when other people retire. So you could have 500 people going through that academy.

**Mr JOHNSON:** If we are going to have the best service, we need the best academy.

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes, I agree.

**The CHAIR:** The time for non-government members at this juncture having expired, I now call on the member for Indooroopilly.

**Mr LEE:** With regard to the output performance of combating major and organised crime as detailed on page 1-21 of the MPS, can you outline whether the illegal activities within motorcycle gangs are focused upon for police investigation as part of this output?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for that question. Authorities believe that motorcycle gang members constitute a significant element of organised crime in Australia. They are involved in numerous criminal activities, including the theft of motor vehicles and, indeed, motorcycles, drug distribution and firearm trafficking. The opposition has previously said that Queensland should

outlaw motorcycle gangs altogether. While it is true that there are certain criminal links in some cases, the logistics of banning all people who come together with a similar hobby such as motorcycles makes the idea quite ridiculous. How would such a thing be policed and how would you define what was a bikie gang as opposed to a group of motorcycle enthusiasts who simply get together on a Sunday afternoon to go for a ride?

Police are working to combat the illegal activities undertaken by some motorcycle gangs. The principal gangs operating within Queensland are motorcycle gangs which are principally based in coastal areas. The State Crime Operations Command maintains dedicated intelligence and investigative teams targeting members and associates of motorcycle gangs involved in criminal activities. The dedicated investigative and intelligence teams provide support to regional police utilising conventional policing methods. They are also engaged in operations targeting individuals associated with motorcycle gangs involved in criminal activity.

A number of regions have also formed specific working groups or are monitoring the activities of motorcycle gangs through their existing intelligence systems. Ongoing liaison occurs between these officers and the dedicated teams within State Crime Operations Command. Partnerships have been established with the Australian Crime Commission and Crime and Misconduct Commission to enhance the targeting of motorcycle gangs committing criminal acts.

Our government takes this issue very seriously, and we are working to combat the problems posed by rogue motorcycle gangs in the most logical and effective manner. In fact, in Western Australia there is a major problem with motorcycle gangs. Obviously when the police ministers meet a couple of times a year these are the sorts of issues we actually discuss. Commissioner, do you have anything to add?

**Mr Atkinson:** I endorse the comments of the minister. The problem of outlaw motorcycle gangs is significant. It is one that cannot be underrated. They are currently engaged in recruiting. They have also diversified in terms of their investments. It is an issue that we must keep at the forefront, and we are doing it.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Page 1-21 of the MPS discusses the output of combating organised and major crime. Could you please outline how the government's new civil confiscation regime complements and assists this objective?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. Mrs Scott, as a member of my parliamentary caucus committee, plays a very active role in assisting me in my role as Police Minister. Those who deal and traffic in illegal drugs increasingly use clandestine methods to do so—methods which, unfortunately, challenge traditional enforcement approaches. These so-called 'Mr Bigs' are our main target in our ongoing initiatives to aid police to bust up drug rings.

Last year we introduced tough new laws giving law enforcement agencies powers to seize property and assets of people involved in serious criminal activities. The Criminal Proceeds Confiscation Act 2002 establishes a new civil confiscation scheme and strengthens the existing conviction based confiscation scheme. Under this new scheme there is a greater onus on suspected criminals to prove that their unexplained wealth has been obtained legally and is not the proceeds of crime. This is an important new tool against the drug syndicates and organised crime bosses who live off the misery of others.

There are many checks and balances. Only those people who have been involved in serious criminal activity will be in any danger of having assets seized. You can imagine the frustration of knowing full well that someone has ill-gotten gains from peddling in the misery of others and not being able to do anything at all about it. That is why the government introduced this legislation: to punish applicable offenders through the seizure and forfeiture of goods bought with the proceeds of crime.

The Proceeds of Crime Unit within the Police Service recently adopted a memorandum of understanding with the Crime and Misconduct Commission to facilitate the investigation and seizure of criminally acquired assets. Since the introduction of this legislation on 1 January this year, 20 joint investigations have been undertaken between the police and the Crime and Misconduct Commission. The Attorney-General advises that assets worth approximately \$7.4 million are the subject of forfeiture applications that are yet to be decided. In the first case where these laws were used, a multijurisdictional drug operation in January, more than \$4.3 million in property, including real estate, a luxury Jaguar motor vehicle and two ocean-going catamarans, was restrained by the Crime and Misconduct Commission. We are committed to cracking down on those who live a life of crime and profit from the misfortune of others, and our civil confiscation regime is greatly assisting us in this goal.

**Mr SHINE:** In the Ministerial Portfolio Statement reference is made to the funding of a road safety initiative into illegal drug use and long-haul truck drivers. Can you elaborate on any findings from this particular initiative?

**Mr McGRADY:** I certainly thank you for the question. As it states in the MPS, the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety is conducting research into this area with the assistance of police. The Queensland Police Service has provided \$45,000 in funding to aid this project. I am pleased to inform the committee that the review into illicit drug use and long-haul truck driving in Queensland is being conducted in two phases. Firstly, 50 truck drivers will be interviewed regarding their drug-taking behaviours. Secondly, written surveys of between 100 and 200 truck drivers will be undertaken. I have been advised that phase 1 will be completed by September this year, with the final report submitted by December.

The research is aimed at looking at trends in this particular industry with a view to enhancing road safety. The research to date suggests that long-haul truck drivers do not view drug use as a problem and that such use is merely work related. From the research, it is also evident that such drivers also do not view the use of over-the-counter stimulants as a form of drug use. However, these are only preliminary findings and it is far too early to draw any final conclusions in relation to the research study. It is quite apparent that long-haul drivers often commence using drugs as a result of workplace issues such as strict time lines for the delivery of goods. Many drivers who use such stimulants do not view themselves as drug addicts in the traditional sense.

Obviously as the Police Minister I am deeply interested in any research which holds the potential to help us improve safety on our roads. This relates to all areas, not merely long-haul drivers. I am eagerly awaiting the outcome of this research and will be more than happy to report back to the member further when the research is complete. This government is serious about improving safety on Queensland's roads. I trust and believe that this report will help us to achieve this.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I direct your attention to the new antihooning laws, which I have a special interest in. I think it is an excellent initiative. Page 1-33 of the MPS discusses new initiatives in relation to traffic policing. How effective have the new antihooning laws been in Queensland since their introduction?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for that question. I have to say that it is one of my babies. Legislation ends up in the parliament and becomes the law of the state in many different ways. You hear people talking about people power. That is how we got this legislation. At every single community meeting the commissioner and I went to the first question was not about burglary, break-ins or car thefts; it was about hooning. As a result of the feedback we were getting from the community, we actually introduced this legislation. I have to say that we got the support of the opposition. I certainly appreciated that.

From the inception of the antihooning legislation to the end of June, 596 vehicles had been confiscated by the police. This includes 170 in the Gold Coast district, 62 in the Logan district, 53 on the Sunshine Coast and 40 in the Townsville district, to name just a few of the hot spots. Under this new legislation, the commission of a second offence carries a penalty of three months vehicle confiscation. Since the introduction of this, there have been only four people who have come back for seconds and one who has come back a third time. He lives in Bundaberg, of all places. If my memory serves me right, he was driving a Porsche. Is that right, Commissioner?

**Mr Atkinson:** I will not argue with you.

**Mr McGRADY:** The point I am making is that it is not just the young hoons; it is people who come from all walks of life. Now I am getting emails and letters from many people congratulating the government on this legislation. It is working. At the end of June there had been 596 confiscations. Since then it has gone over 600.

**Mr JOHNSON:** And reducing the road toll.

**Mr McGRADY:** It is reducing the road toll and it is teaching people a lesson. Of those 600 people who lost their vehicle for 48 hours, four have come back for seconds and one has come back a third time. To me, that indicates that the legislation is working. If you go around any group of people, you will find them saying that this is one of the best pieces of legislation any government has brought in in a long time. I am proud of what the parliament did. As I said before, I acknowledge the support we received from the opposition. It is certainly legislation which I am proud of.

**Mr LEE:** Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to a database established to modernise the homicide group's cold case records. What other initiatives does the Queensland Police Service have in place to investigate older unsolved crimes?

**Mr McGRADY:** Thankyou for the question. The cold case team within the Homicide Investigation Group has been in place since 2001. The team was modernised with the establishment of the current unsolved murder database, which commenced on 3 March this year. This system enables details regarding these cases to be stored in one place in an electronic format for the first time. This database is available for use by all officers performing duties within the homicide group.

There are currently 62 unsolved murders and 25 people who have been reported missing under suspicious circumstances listed on this database. The cold case team has recently solved the murders of Cyril Crust, who was murdered in his home in April 1997 at Samford, and Kenneth Charles, who was murdered in November 1997 in his home at Calamvale. An offender was arrested and charged with the murder of Mr Crust in April this year. In South Australia in December last year an offender was arrested for the murder of Mr Charles.

This is another example of the ways in which we are striving to modernise the Police Service and further develop smart policing here in the Smart State. The database includes all of the operation names, locations and details of crime. The work of this team is vital. I am sure that the resolution of these historical cases will bring great comfort for the relatives who have spent sometimes years without getting the closure that comes from the arrest of the perpetrator of a crime such as the murder of their loved one.

Just a few weeks ago—I cannot mention names for obvious reasons—the commissioner and I met with a family whose relative was missing. They believed that this person had been murdered and they believed that they knew who the perpetrator of the crime was. I sat there and listened to this family explain what it is like to (a) have somebody lost and (b) have somebody they honestly believe has been murdered. Yet for a number of reasons the police could not take any action. There were tears. I felt, for the first time ever, what it must be like when a member of your family suffers that. So anything at all should be done to bring a conclusion to a death. In any case when someone dies people have to go through a period of grief, but it is different when there is somebody who you believe is dead or has been murdered and yet nobody has paid the price for that crime. That is why this to me is an excellent scheme.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, page 1-17 of the MPS discusses training for police attending clandestine laboratory sites. Can you detail how often police are required to dismantle these labs and how does this process assist in our battle against drug use in Queensland?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. Clandestine drug laboratories are a major aspect of drug investigations. In the last two years 294 laboratories have been closed, and 151 have been shut down in the last 12 months. The government is committed to the fight against illegal drugs, and I am very pleased to inform the committee that at a recent national meeting a proposal was agreed upon for the establishment of an early warning system which will be put before a meeting of Australian police ministers in November of this year. The early warning system will alert Queensland, and indeed other authorities, to suspicious requests for chemicals typically used in the production of amphetamines and other illegal drugs.

The proposed early warning system would mean authorities could share information recorded about drug precursor chemicals and the individuals or, indeed, the companies which purchase them. It would certainly limit the ability of criminals to evade scrutiny by authorities where they purchase precursors in more than one state. The system could also assist authorities in identifying key trends in the manufacture and distribution of amphetamine type stimulants both locally and internationally.

We have also recently allocated \$45,000 for a project to assist police safety when uncovering and dismantling illegal backyard laboratories. The clandestine laboratory safety awareness project has commenced as of the middle of this month and is designed to boost safety for police in dismantling drug laboratories. Many people do not realise that dismantling these labs, which frequently contain highly volatile chemical combinations, can be a dangerous job. Police have also established a Queensland amphetamines strategy committee consisting of representatives from law enforcement and industry which aims to develop strategies to minimise the diversion of precursor chemicals and equipment to the illicit manufacture of amphetamines.

I conclude by saying that our government is determined to get tough on those who seek to traffic in drugs and the currency of human misery. I am sure someone will ask a question later on

today about police beats and shopfronts, but I recently opened a police shopfront in one of the outer suburbs of Brisbane and within the first month of the opening of the shopfront as a result of information passed in over the counter to the officer four laboratories were closed down. I venture to say that sometimes people who go to police beats or shopfronts would not necessarily walk into a police station.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you, Minister. The time for government members' questions has now expired.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer the minister to page 1-22 of the MPS. Under 'Future developments' it refers to the work of the Sexual Crimes Investigation Unit, saying—

... it will 'continue to work with other stakeholders to develop effective strategies to address community concerns over the release of convicted child sex offenders into the community after serving terms of imprisonment.

I am very concerned about the increase in the number of these offences which continue to come to light as well as the recent allegations of the abuse of children by foster carers. It is critical that we have in place the strategies that you have noted in the MPS. However, it is just as important for police to be able to do their work in investigating these claims. Minister, can you advise that the Queensland Police Service is investigating these claims, and are you aware of any legal impediments to the police carrying out these investigations?

**Mr McGRADY:** I could not agree more with the sentiments that you have expressed, because the issue of child abuse and paedophilia is clearly one which the community has shown an increasing interest in in recent years, and in particular in the last 12 months. A number of high profile cases and the tabling in the parliament of *The report of the board of inquiry into past handling of complaints of sexual abuse in the Anglican Church diocese of Brisbane* have contributed to this interest. Preventing child sexual abuse is everybody's business, and we must constantly work together to put a stop to abuse wherever it occurs. The Queensland Police Service addresses the serious issue generally through its Juvenile Aid Bureau and the CIB branches across the state. Additionally, the Child and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit and Task Force Argos within the State Crime Operational Command fulfil specific roles in combating child abuse and paedophilia.

The Child and Sexual Assault Investigation Unit investigates allegations of child abuse in the majority of the Brisbane metropolitan area as well as providing assistance to regional police in complex or multijurisdictional investigations. The sexual abuse investigation unit also coordinates and conducts the Juvenile Aid Bureau training, sexual offences courses, the interviewing of children and the recording of evidence, and the officers are trained for that.

In June 2003 the Queensland Police Service received a complaint that a number of foster carers in a certain part of the state had been committing offences amounting to sexual and physical abuse of children in their care. The Department of Families also launched an internal investigation into the matter. So, Mr Johnson, as I said in an answer to a previous question, this is of major concern not just to the government but also I am sure to the opposition—

**Mr JOHNSON:** Absolutely.

**Mr McGRADY:** Yes, and to all people who have any morals. Anybody who hurts a child, particularly in a sexual way, to me is the lowest of the low. The Queensland Police Service is dedicated, together with other agencies within government, to finding these people. You would be aware of the legislation we introduced into the parliament regarding paedophiles inside the prison system. I would like to discuss that when it comes to Corrective Services's report. I talked before about antihooning legislation, but with this legislation once people have been caught and they have done their time, and if they have not changed their ways, the matter can be referred to the courts to prevent some of these people getting out of prison.

**Mr JOHNSON:** The effective strategy I would support is a royal commission. Minister, would you support a royal commission to flush this scum out to let the Queensland police clean up this despicable obscene crime against the most innocent and sacred component of our society—our children?

**Mr McGRADY:** Today people often come across with every little problem we have. I am certainly not suggesting that this is a little problem; it is not. I do not want to play politics with this because I have mentioned before that the opposition has the same concerns that we do, and it should be a non-party political issue. But you can keep on having royal commissions. We just had the report into what went on in the Anglican Church, and that was tabled in the parliament, but we really have a standing commission in the children's commission.

**Mr JOHNSON:** It would open it up, though, Minister, to let the police have a clean go.

**Mr McGRADY:** It is a whole-of-government issue. I personally, as the Minister for Police, or indeed as a member of the cabinet, have not been convinced of the need for a royal commission. We have a children's commissioner; we have a children's commission. Our government has demonstrated whenever the need arose that we would assist and we would support inquiries, such as the one which the new Anglican Archbishop of Brisbane had the strength and the courage to initiate. We support those sorts of initiatives, but I yet have not been convinced of the need for a royal commission.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, can you explain why your plans failed to meet the Beattie government's target of employing 365 additional police officers every year as indicated in the crime prevention strategy published in 1999 by only employing an additional 297 police this financial year? I refer you to page 1-17 of the MPS.

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank Mr Johnson for the question. I wish he would not have asked this one, though, because I hate being political. I recall that when your government was in office you made certain commitments about police numbers which you did not fulfil.

**Mr JOHNSON:** You have too, Minister.

**Mr McGRADY:** No, I have not.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Yes, you have.

**Mr McGRADY:** No, I have not. At the last election we gave a commitment—a promise—which was signed in concrete that we would employ an additional 300 police officers per year. In 2000-01 it was 357. In 2001-02 it was 298. Two of them got sick and had to go home. In 2002-03 it was 307. So the commitment that we made up to the year 2005 we have met. In fact, we have employed more police than we said we would.

But it is not just a matter of employing police officers. We also employ civilians. You have to work within a budget. I would love to be able to employ 300 police and 300 civilians each year. You cannot do it. We have identified about 800 positions which could be filled by civilians. Some time in the parliament I can give you a run-down of the ones we have identified—a minimum of 800. But, Mr Johnson, you are terribly wrong, because the commitment we gave at the last election was that we would employ about 300 police officers—

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am not wrong. This statement here is wrong; that is what I am saying. I am just asking a straight-out question.

**Mr McGRADY:** The commitment we gave is that we would increase the number of police officers by 300 per year. We have made that promise. We signed that commitment in concrete and we are delivering. In fact, you attended the last graduation ceremony with me and I know you were impressed.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Absolutely.

**Mr McGRADY:** You were saying, 'I did not realise you were employing so many police officers, all young people.' The average age is 27. The commitment we gave we have met. I do not want to fall out with you, Vaughan—

**Mr JOHNSON:** I am a bad bugger to fall out with.

**Mr McGRADY:**—but on this occasion you are terribly wrong.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, we praise the introduction of police beats similar to those in the UK. It is a terrific initiative. Examining the functions of the three styles—shopfront, residential and what I would term 'community beats' like shopfronts within a residential area—I believe that the most expensive but nonetheless the most effective are residential beats. Can you demonstrate in accordance with the service's future goals what proportion of the total number of beats will be residential? Given the costs involved, is there not a risk that shopfronts and community beats will be seen and act as second-rate, low cost police stations?

**Mr McGRADY:** That is a very good question. You would have seen the report by the CMC recently about the success or otherwise of police beats. They came out with rave reports about their success. This was not political; this was from an independent organisation analysing the results of police beats. I have to say that when the police beat initiative was first introduced we had the residential ones, which you are referring to, and we also had those in shopping centres. Initially, the shop developers were very keen to have established in their centres these shopfronts.

**Mr FLYNN:** But, Minister, I also refer to the style in Loganlea, where there is a beat but it is not a residential one.

**Mr McGRADY:** Sure, and I will come to that. They want a shopfront in their complex for obvious reasons, but it also provides security in the shopping centre. Initially, these developers were providing the office free of rent, and we would go and spend \$60,000, \$70,000 or \$80,000 in fitting it out. The tendency in recent times has been that the developers are not prepared to provide those premises rent free. I think in any walk of life there is a bit of give and take.

My personal view is that the most successful is the police beat in the suburb, and it is not taking away from the police station—no way. Because what happens is that you have the police officer, and in many cases his wife and kids, living on the premises. As I demonstrated before, we have the results of people coming into police beats and reporting instances of crime where normally they would not. They would not walk into a police station.

You also have a situation where the police officer and his wife shop at the same shop, their kids go to the same schools as the other kids in the neighbourhood and the police officer becomes part of the community. The commissioner and myself open these all of the time. We opened one in Cairns just a few weeks ago. There would have been 200 people from the community who had come to the opening. People see this as going to be of tremendous value to the suburb. When you go back again the reduction in crime—these are not my figures—on average is 43 per cent. In one area of Ipswich crime was reduced by 68 per cent. To me, police beats certainly are the way of the future, but under no circumstances would it ever take away the role of the police station.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, your portfolio statement shows the commitment to the provision of police liaison officers. This is a very sensible initiative. However, can you indicate to the committee the progress of this scheme, and will it eventually include officers for Asian migrants in high-density residential areas who themselves do have some difficulties initially in coming to terms with Queensland's legal framework and the powers of its police officers?

**Mr McGRADY:** You may notice that PLOs are not just Aboriginals. In Boulia, which is in my electorate, we had an Indian as a PLO. If you go around some of the suburbs of Brisbane, there are many Asians and other nationalities who are PLOs, so they are not just Aboriginals.

One of the problems we do have is recruiting people, particularly Chinese. There are currently 125 PLO positions and that includes indigenous police liaison officers. We have two Chinese, four Vietnamese, two Samoans and three others. My Indian one from Boulia is not here.

The point is taken. It is not just a matter of employing or recruiting Aboriginal people, indigenous people; it is about trying to recruit others. If you are in Inala, for example, you would obviously want Vietnamese PLOs. The Police Service try to recruit them but it is not always possible. Certainly the policy that you are—

**Mr FLYNN:** Keep going on it, Minister.

**Mr McGRADY:** We will do, because the PLO system has proven highly successful. What we are trying to do is to get Aboriginal people from the communities to apply for positions as PLOs, get the training there and then become fully fledged police officers. That is probably what it is all about.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, school based police have been in place now for some years and, of course, like everything they come at a price. The commissioner might raise his eyebrows at this, but I actually believe it is quite appalling that society has got to the extent that we actually require police in our schools. Are you able to demonstrate in some way the degree of success of the scheme, and is it financially viable in the long term? I understand that students do relate to police now and we find the need to do that, but I just wonder about a society where we have found it necessary to put a police officer in a school. Have we circumvented the discipline system somehow?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for that. Can I just say that I am a supporter of school based policing. However, I know that the opposition policy, which they recently announced—I am sorry Mr Johnson is not here—gave a commitment to establish 50 additional school based police officers. That is noble, but the question one has to ask is: where do they come from? Do you take those police officers off the beat? Do you take them out of the specialist groups? Do you take them out of the tactical crime squads? Do you take them out of the Flying Squad? Where do these 50 police officers come from? And the cost. It is not just about paying the wages. It costs

about \$36,000 to set it up, about \$10,000 a year for ongoing maintenance and \$70,000 a year in labour costs. This would require the commitment of about \$6 million.

There was a slowing-off of the establishment of school based police officers, but in recent times I have requested the commissioner to try to increase the number of school based officers we have. The reason I am supportive of this is for the reasons you outlined. If we can get a situation where high school students get to know the man or the woman in blue—the police officer—and see them as the friend as opposed to being the enemy, it starts them off in the right way as they leave school and go into the workplace. There are also many problems which young people face when they are at school and if they can go and discuss it with somebody—sometimes they do not like to discuss it with the school counsellor. Sometimes they like to discuss it with a police officer. They can also give the school based police officer information.

**Mr FLYNN:** Minister, more to the commissioner than yourself, but what you are talking about could be achieved by an essential change in the attitude of some police officers—and I stress some; I was one for 24 years—towards youth on the streets, because sometimes youths do cop a bit of a hard time.

**Mr McGRADY:** And they tell me you did a wonderful job, too.

**Mr FLYNN:** Is that right? Thank you.

**Mr ATKINSON:** No, it is a good initiative and it is a good scheme as, of course, are many others, including the three concepts of beat shopfront policing that you mentioned earlier and the police liaison officer scheme that you mentioned earlier. I think one of the particular advantages of the school based police officer scheme is probably self-evident—that it does enable young people going through what are often difficult and challenging years to identify with police officers. I think that young people essentially could be classified in three groups—those that will never be a problem, those that regrettably will probably end up in prison and in the middle there are many young people who can be influenced positively, and I think it enables us to do that.

**Mr FLYNN:** Thank you, Commissioner.

**Mr BELL:** Thank you, Minister, for taking note of the letter I gave to the Clerk that you obviously have about the area of my interest. Minister, would you please indicate the amount of overtime budgeted for the current financial year within the Gold Coast police district, how that compares with last year's allocation and how many hours of officer overtime that relates to?

**Mr McGRADY:** Thank you, Mr Bell. As you have wisely pointed out, when I found out that you were on the panel I thought the best thing we could do is bring down the assistant commissioner from the Gold Coast because I had appreciated that you, first of all, wanted to come along here today to congratulate us on the initiatives we have taken regarding the increased police numbers at Surfers Paradise in particular. I know you are grateful for that.

**Mr BELL:** I truly am, Minister.

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for your thankyou. It is very much appreciated. As regards overtime, I could give you the answer but I think the assistant commissioner from the Gold Coast, Mr David Melville, would love to respond to your question, so over to the assistant commissioner.

**Mr Melville:** I can inform the committee that the south-eastern region has been allocated \$74.1 million this financial year. This is up from a final allocation of \$72.8 million for the 2002-03 financial year. Whilst the budget allocation has not actually been devolved to either the Logan district or the Gold Coast district at this point in time, that has been largely due to the final receipts only just being received from last year and that the salary adjustments for May and June have not quite arrived at this point in time. I am confident that that devolution will take place over the next few days or no more than the next couple of weeks.

In determining the budget allocation specifically for overtime in the Gold Coast and Logan districts, it is largely in the hands of the district officer to apportion that part of his overall operational budget. The type of indicators which he utilises are, firstly, historical usage and workload, the impact of major events—which, of course, in the case of the Gold Coast is fairly significant—and regional and district policing strategies. Some of these, for example, at the Gold Coast are Operation Amatol, which looks after policing street crime and liquor offences in and about Surfers Paradise. We have found that to be quite a successful operation in and around Cavill Mall since it began in late February/early March and Operation Helium, for example, which has been targeting street offences in the southern end of the Gold Coast between Burleigh

Heads and Coolangatta. Of course, the fourth key aspect is intelligence and the use of that intelligence to determine what the upcoming usage of overtime may well be.

However, there is an important overarching policy which I have introduced since going to the Gold Coast and that is operational overtime. If it is actually needed, not just wanted, after a consideration of a redeployment of staff that should always be approved. The reason for that is to ensure that we give critical policing services to the community and ensure community safety no matter what the cost if it is needed at that time. They are some fundamental principles, and I am sure that there will be scope to increase the overtime allocation this year.

**Mr BELL:** Do you have to pay for things like extra activities at schoolies and Indy and if you have the mounted police?

**Mr Melville:** The mounted police is a matter of negotiating with operational support command, but it would be usual for us to determine the budget associated with that and to seek a budget adjustment. It would be normal that the budget adjustment would be made either through the QPS or via a CBRC submission in the case of this year. Those final determinations are yet to be made. The operational planning for schoolies is at its earlier stage.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time for non-government members' questions has expired. I call the member for Toowoomba North.

**Mr SHINE:** At page 1-33 it is advised that the government is conducting research into the speed camera program with regard to the period of time that a driver's behaviour is influenced after passing an operational police camera site. Can the minister report any results of this research to date?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank Mr Shine for the question because promoting road safety is something which the government regards as a key responsibility. Too often people use this issue as a political football and I believe it deserves more attention than that.

To midnight on Monday night the Queensland road toll was 164 deaths so far this year compared with 151 at the same time last year. I think the fact that about 50 lives are lost each year due to speeding should be a sobering enough reminder that road safety is a vitally important issue. That is 15 deaths more than at the same time last year.

The MPS notes that the number of vehicles monitored per detected speed camera offences increased in 2002-03 in comparison to estimated figures. However, it is pleasing to note that, despite the increase in the vehicles monitored, the number of offences detected has actually decreased. This decrease may be attributed to proactive traffic patrols, public awareness and, of course, media campaigns. We thank the media for the help and assistance which they give us.

The government has provided \$5,000 a year for three years to assist a research project into the effects of speed cameras on driver behaviour. This study is a joint project between the Queensland Police Service, the Queensland Transport Department, the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety and the Australian Research Council. The research project will aim to develop a model of best practice in speed camera enforcement. It will compare the impact of intermittent reinforcement scheduling, or our current system, and fixed reinforcement or permanent speed camera programs on driver behaviour.

The Department of Main Roads has provided vehicle loop counters capable of monitoring individual vehicle speeds at particular intervals before and after a nominated speed camera site. The researchers will be able to assess the speeds of vehicles travelling prior to and after leaving the speed camera site. This will assist in determining both the level and duration of impact upon the driver's speeding behaviour before and after a speed camera site. This project is set to begin later this month.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** I refer to page 1-30 of the MPS, which discusses public perceptions on crime and safety, and I ask: can the minister elaborate on how Queensland compares with other jurisdictions in relation to actual crime rates?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member again for that very sensible question. Policing and fighting crime is an ongoing battle and there is certainly no finishing line. Our job is to reduce and prevent as much crime as we can. Since the election of our government, we have achieved some success in this regard. I am pleased to relay an outstanding result in the area of armed robberies against financial institutions. Incredibly, since the inception of the police Armed Robbery Unit in 2001 a massive decrease has occurred in this sort of crime, with 89 offences committed against financial institutions in 2001, dropping to just three so far in 2003. It is also heartening to note that

two independent reports this year vindicate our efforts and highlighted Queensland's status as the safe state, with our crime rates falling well below national averages in many categories.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics' *Crime and safety report* released just last month revealed that this state has the lowest level in the nation of victimisation and personal crimes, including robbery, assault and sexual assault. Queensland's total personal crime categories of 4.7 per cent compare with the national average of 5.3 per cent. The victimisation level for household break-ins in Queensland has also dropped from 5.4 per cent in 1998 to five per cent in 2002.

The level of victims of motor vehicle theft sits at 1.3 per cent, the second lowest level in the nation and the same level as 1993. The results of this survey indicate that our ongoing commitment to law and order is paying off. However, statistics are cold comfort to those who have been victims of crime. These positive results come on the back of the *Recorded crime 2002* report, also by the Bureau of Statistics, which confirmed Queensland is now experiencing its lowest levels of reported crime for unlawful entry, homicide, armed robbery, unarmed robbery and motor vehicle theft in a decade. Compared with 1997 under the previous coalition government the rate of unlawful entry is 16 per cent lower, armed robbery is 36 per cent lower, unarmed robbery is 10 per cent lower, motor vehicle theft is 15 per cent lower and homicide is 14 per cent lower. However, we must be vigilant and continue to work to enhance our initiatives to prevent and reduce crime, like our record increases to police numbers and police funding.

**Mr LEE:** I draw the attention of the minister to page 1-1 of the MPS, which discusses the capital works program for the Police Service, and I ask: can the minister detail how this will assist residents of Brisbane's western suburbs?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. I had the honour of attending a meeting of some of his Neighbourhood Watch members some weeks ago. I was very impressed with the way in which they were organised. I am very pleased to inform the committee that a replacement police station for Sherwood is full steam ahead, with \$430,000 provided in this year's state budget, and we anticipate that the station will be completed in the current financial year. The design of this station is near completion and plans will soon be unveiled so that community consultation processes can begin. It is estimated that the cost will be \$450,000, with \$20,000 spent on the project in the year 2002-03. I am sure that local businesses and Neighbourhood Watch groups in the Sherwood area will be particularly pleased to hear about this new law and order facility, which will mean officers from the Sherwood station will have the capacity to be on duty 24 hours a day.

I know it is a different issue, but I have just received some exciting news that I think the committee would be pleased with. I am sure Mr Johnson will be happy with this. It is an announcement from the CMC which states—

A year-long Crime and Misconduct Commission investigation in partnership with the ACC and the Queensland police has resulted in a major drug trafficking operation in south-east Queensland being closed down. Operation Ellis targeted the production and interstate trafficking of illegal drugs. Early today around 50 investigators from the three agencies conducted a series of searches on several addresses in Brisbane and other parts of the south-east. Three people were arrested and will appear in the Brisbane Magistrates Court tomorrow. Those arrested have been charged with a series of offences relating to the production, supply and trafficking of dangerous drugs. As a result of today's operation, assets worth an estimated \$1.7 million were restrained, including a number of houses and other properties, luxury motor vehicles and bank accounts. A small quantity of amphetamines was also seized.

That gives members an idea of what we were talking about before. To get an announcement from the CMC today during the estimates I think demonstrates that we are working not only to find these criminals and Mr Bigs of the drug trade but also on confiscating the profits of crime. I know that detracted a little from the member's question, but I thought members of the committee would be interested in that information.

**The CHAIR:** I refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS, where it discusses how many extra police will be employed in this financial year. Can the minister detail how many extra police have been employed under the Beattie government and elaborate on any new initiatives which have been made possible through these increases?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. It is a matter of public record that our government is providing more funding and putting more police on the beat than any government before us. Mr Johnson asked about this earlier and I said that on average we increase the number of police by about 300 a year. In some years it is 350; in others it is 300. But the important point is that by the year 2005 we will have 9,100 police. But, as I say, it is not 300 every year. It fluctuates, but at the end of 2005 there will be 9,100. The approved strength of the

Queensland Police Service at 1 June was 8,242 compared with 6,808 when we came to office in mid-1998. That is more than 1,400 extra police under our government.

During 2003-04 we will employ about 300 police. Last financial year we employed 307 police. The former coalition government, of which the member opposite was a part, had an appalling record on both funding and boosting police numbers. The last coalition promised an increase of 695 police but delivered only 437—nowhere near their target despite all of their rhetoric and promises. Compare what they said with what they did. Compare what we have said with what we have done.

Our ongoing program to boost police numbers is paying off, with our police to population ratio now well below the national average. In 2002-03 the Queensland police to population ratio is expected to be one per 442 compared with an expected national police to population ratio of one to 446. With the strong growth in police numbers, it is anticipated that in 2003-04 Queensland's police to population ratio will reduce to one to 435, less than the current national average should it remain static. By 2004-05, that ratio is anticipated to have decreased further to one for every 430. These increases will enable us to establish 16 tactical crime squads by February 2004 to target known criminal hot spots, property crime and drug offenders. The 11 squads established so far have achieved some outstanding results. Between June 2002 and June 2003, these squads laid 12,289 charges, including break and enters, drug offences, assaults and unlawful use of motor vehicles to name just a few. Mr Chairman, as you would appreciate, the Police Service is doing a magnificent job.

**The CHAIR:** The time allotted for the consideration of the estimates of the Police Service has expired. The committee will now adjourn for a 10-minute break. The hearing will resume sharply at 5.50 p.m.

Sitting suspended from 5.40 p.m. to 5.47 p.m.

**The CHAIR:** I think it is fair, ladies and gentlemen, to say good evening, not good afternoon. The committee will consider the estimates of the Department of Corrective Services.

**Mr JOHNSON:** My first question is in relation to page 3-2 of the MPS. It refers to the fact that the government has successfully designed, built, maintained and operated safe, healthy and secure facilities when referring to both custodial and community based environments. In a media release on 1 July 2003, Minister, you stated that in the last 24 months authorities have located a number of mobile phones in Queensland's centres through routine and targeted searches. Exactly how many mobile phones have been located in Queensland correctional centres in your tenure as the minister and how often are routine and targeted searches carried out?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mobile telephones pose a threat to the good order and security of prisons, giving prisoners unmonitored access, for example, to associates on the outside to plan criminal activities or indeed prison break-outs. That is why we are attacking the problem with a three-pronged strategy, firstly prevention. This involves searches of all material entering Queensland prisons, including personal mail and food and materials used by prison industries. These searches are done by X-ray machines, metal detectors and hand inspection by staff. The second aim of the strategy is detection, that is, detection of the small numbers of mobile phones that have managed to squeeze through the prevention net.

I was at a Corrective Services meeting in Melbourne last week or the week before. New South Wales Corrective Services have done an investigation into the numbers of mobile phones coming into the New South Wales prisons. To give you an idea, between January 2000 and September 2001, 92 mobile phones and SIM cards were found.

**Mr JOHNSON:** That is in New South Wales?

**Mr McGRADY:** That is in New South Wales, yes, and 35, or 38 per cent of those 92, had over 56,000 calls. Fifty-four per cent, or 50 phones recovered, were from inmates of Middle Eastern background. Ten civilians were suspected of being involved in introducing phones into correctional centres. I am not being dramatic here, but these are some of the ways in which they get mobile phones into the prison system. Here I have some pictures showing the various methods they can use. There is a tin of beans and at the bottom is a mobile phone. You have a tin of sardines or any tin and a mobile phone is inside. Then you have this Walkman with the mobile phone inside. You have the old block of cheddar cheese with the mobile phone inside. Our number is 10—can I have an extension of time?

**Mr JOHNSON:** Yes.

**Mr McGRADY:** These figures from New South Wales terrify me. They had this major investigation into how many mobile phones were in the prison and they found 95. We find 10. What I am saying is that, based on the evidence we have from New South Wales, we should start to examine a lot of the information that we have received in this report.

Coming back to Queensland, we found three mobile phones in dirty laundry from hospitals, two were found hidden in a delivery truck and one was sent in the mail. What worries me is that, if 95 mobiles phones can get in, what do we do about drugs? What do we do about drugs which enter prisons in little tiny packets like this? That is a worry. I assure you, Mr Johnson, that since I went to that ministerial meeting and I discovered this information, I am really, really concerned and we will be paying very special attention to this in the months and the years ahead. Thanks for the extension of time.

**Mr JOHNSON:** You probably partly answered the next part of the question I was going to ask. What are you going to do about the situation in Queensland, bearing in mind you just identified how grave the situation is in New South Wales? Maybe it is the same here. Are you going to have more stringent precautionary measures implemented or put in place and how many staff will you have to carry out that procedure?

**Mr McGRADY:** When you are dealing with prisons and corrective services you have to be very, very careful what you say publicly, for obvious reasons. I say to you that we had identified the problem of mobile phones getting into the prisons. I have to say that if Queensland is half as bad as New South Wales we have a major problem on our hands. I cannot say to this meeting today what we are going to do, for obvious reasons. I just say to you that that was the information that we received and, as I said a moment ago, if you can get the mobile phones in, what is happening with the drugs? It comes back again to another issue, which is strip searching. I was one of those ministers who made myself very unpopular with this group of people when I introduced strip searching. I believe we have to do everything we can to stop drugs and other forms of contraband getting into the prisons. Some of the people who bring the stuff in to the prisoners are experts in this field.

As a result of that meeting I went to in Melbourne, there is going to be the examination of a national trial to try to block mobile phone reception. This is a problem. I volunteered one or two of our prisons to go on the national plan, but you cannot have this plan where there are residential or business areas around the prison because you simply cannot stop the reception coming in or out of the prison. Where we have a prison in an isolated place we believe it could work. The federal government has some concerns and I can understand the concerns, but I think this is such a major problem that I did volunteer that if Queensland could participate in the scheme we certainly would. That scheme would mean that you cannot use telephones to get calls out or into the prison. That is done by some very delicate equipment—expensive, but delicate. Those are the sorts of things that we are talking about. There are other things we are doing and we will be doing but I would prefer not to say so in public. If you want a brief on it, I am happy to do so.

**Mr JOHNSON:** How many prisoners currently occupy the Maryborough prison, bearing in mind that you said during the Maryborough by-election that it would have the full complement of inmates in three months?

**Mr McGRADY:** The Maryborough prison is a great success story because not only do we have the prison there providing all those jobs—and a modern prison—but you would be aware of some of the fundraising activity the local community arranged. One of them was the 'Jail House Rock', which raised over \$50,000. As you know, the Maryborough Corrective Services centre was opened by the Premier. The centre was designed to accommodate 500 prisoners. That is including remand and reception as well as protection and mainstream prisoners. So it is across-the-board. The prison is being commissioned in three stages. The first stage was 200 prisoners, who started moving in on 31 March this year. We expect to have the remaining prisoners in there by 30 June. There are 194 today. So 97 per cent of approved capacity is now being used.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer you to page 3-7 of the MPS, which outlines the spread of staff across Corrective Services. In the Queensland Government Gazette No. 40 published on 13 June 2003 there is a series of management positions advertised. In fact, there are 10 general manager positions advertised for various correctional centres throughout the state. Can you please explain why all 10 of the senior prison jobs in Queensland's custodial correction centres are vacant? When will they be filled? Is this a matter of senior officers having to reapply for their positions?

**Mr McGRADY:** Before I answer your question, I am sorry. I misled you when I said 97 per cent of approved places were full. The prison is built for 500 prisoners, as I said. We have 197

there now, which is 97 per cent of the approved places. There is no definite plan at this stage to fill the prison with the other 300, but when required we will move in.

**Mr JOHNSON:** So do you have the full complement of staff there addressing that?

**Mr McGRADY:** We have sufficient staff at Maryborough—the approved numbers of staff at Maryborough. I do not want to give you the impression that I said 97 per cent of the 500. It was 97 per cent of the approved number, which is 200 at this stage. I am sorry, the other question you asked? I was busy checking the figures.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I will read it again. On page 3-7 of the MPS it outlines the spread of staff across Corrective Services. In the Queensland Government Gazette No. 40 published on 13 June this year there is a series of management positions advertised. In fact, there are 10 general manager positions advertised for various correctional centres throughout the state. Can you please explain why all 10 of the senior prison jobs in Queensland custodial correction centres are vacant? When will they be filled? Is this a matter of senior officers having to reapply for their positions?

**Mr McGRADY:** I will ask the acting director-general to respond to that question.

**Mr Rule:** There are no general management positions in correctional centres in Queensland vacant at this time.

**Mr JOHNSON:** There are not? In the Queensland Government Gazette No. 40 there were a series of management positions advertised. What are those positions then?

**Mr Rule:** I am sorry, I am not familiar with that particular document.

**Mr JOHNSON:** In fact, there are 10 general manager positions advertised for various correctional centres around the state. So that is not right?

**Mr McGRADY:** Can we take that question on notice, because there is an error somewhere.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer to staffing within the Department of Corrective Services—page 3-7 of the MPS—but on this occasion with regard to the Director-General, Ms Helen Ringrose: can you advise the committee what position Ms Ringrose is currently filling within your government? Will she be returning to the role of Director-General of Corrective Services?

**Mr McGRADY:** Ms Ringrose was seconded to a position by the Premier. The Premier deals with directors-general. So that is a question which really should have been directed to the Premier.

**Mr JOHNSON:** So you do not know if she is coming back to Corrective Services?

**Mr McGRADY:** No, that is a decision of the Premier.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Are you aware of any grievance complaints either lodged by Ms Ringrose or in relation to her? If so, what is the status of these complaints?

**Mr McGRADY:** Grievance complaints against—

**Mr JOHNSON:** Ms Ringrose.

**Mr McGRADY:** Am I aware of any?

**Mr JOHNSON:** Are you aware of any grievance complaints lodged against her?

**Mr McGRADY:** I am not aware, no.

**Mr JOHNSON:** I again refer to the significant underspend for property, plant and equipment last year. Does this reduced figure take into account the 13 armoured vehicles that have been out of action since May for use as perimeter security at eight of Queensland's corrective facilities? If so, can you advise of the estimated saving that has been made within the budget for property, plant and equipment by failing to repair and run these 13 vehicles for the last two months of the 2002-03 financial year?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank Mr Johnson for the question. You are referring to the Hummers?

**Mr JOHNSON:** Yes.

**Mr McGRADY:** They patrol the perimeters of the prisons—or used to. The department currently leases 13 of these vehicles which operate as perimeter patrol vehicles at the secure prisons and also as armoured escort vehicles. All of those 13 vehicles are on a five-year lease, which will progressively expire between May this year and March next year. The first Hummer commenced operation at the Sir David Longland prison in April 1988 and the others followed over a period of some 11 months.

The reliability of the Hummers has been an ongoing concern with the amount of time spent out of operation due to mechanical failure being a significant problem. Since April 1998, the department has spent over half a million dollars on repairs to the Hummers, with over \$64,000 from July to April this financial year alone. On 21 May this year, advice was received from Queensland Transport via Q-Fleet that they had detected a significant mechanical problem with these vehicles. As a result of that advice, all Hummers were immediately withdrawn from operational deployment at all prisons and from transport and escort operations. As you said, the vehicles remain out of action as we speak.

Russell Cooper, who was the minister when Mr Brendon Abbott escaped, rushed in and bought these vehicles. I was not involved at the time, but the vast majority of people I talk to about these Hummers tell me that it was a very poor decision. I think that the figures that I have given you tonight would indicate that it is a major concern. In fact, the Department of Transport actually pulled them off the road. There is no way in the world if the Department of Transport are telling me—or the acting director-general—that these vehicles are unfit or unroadworthy that I am going to insist that they be driven. I am not and I will not.

But the other thing, too, is that if you are talking about security—and I will come to the costs in a moment—since the days that the state bought these Hummers there has been an extra fence around the perimeter of the prisons. So where you had one fence, you now have two. Again, if you want the financial aspects of this, I am more than happy to have Ray Pulsford explain it to you, but I am going to need additional time.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Can we get that later?

**Mr McGRADY:** That is fine.

**Mr JOHNSON:** When do you expect the joint working party to report back to you on developing other options for perimeter security? In the interim, what measures have been put in place at Queensland's correctional facilities so that security is not compromised? How much has been allocated in the 2003-04 budget for these measures?

**Mr McGRADY:** On the evening that the Department of Transport pulled those Hummers off the road, I was faced with a demand that we replace them within the hour. It was crazy stuff, because you cannot get them anywhere at all in the world. Then we had a demand that we get the army to use their vehicles to patrol the outskirts of the prisons. We could not do that. I tried the police to see if they had any vehicles and they did not, because they used to borrow the Hummers when they needed them. So what I did to show good faith with the union—or the delegates—is that I went out to the prison and I spoke to the state president and one of the delegates. I said, 'We want to assure you that this is not about cutting jobs' and it is not. I gave them a firm undertaking that whatever we did would not mean redundancy as a result of any change. I repeat that tonight: there will be no redundancies as a result of any changes which may occur. That is the important point.

The second point is that I invited the union to join a working party, which they accepted, and a report has been drawn up. It has not come to me yet. That report has not yet been finalised. So the matter is before the commission. Commissioner Brown gave the working group four weeks to report to the acting director-general. The acting director-general will then bring the report to me and then we will decide what action we are going to take.

As I said before, these 13 Hummers are leased. Obviously we will not be paying lease payments after 4 March next year. So there will be some savings there—we will come back to the finance of that. But I can assure both the staff of the prison and the public that—

**Mr JOHNSON:** Security will not be compromised.

**Mr McGRADY:** No, it will not be compromised, because we have that extra perimeter around the prison.

**The CHAIR:** Order! The time for non-government members has expired. It is time for questions from government members. I call the member for Toowoomba North.

**Mr SHINE:** Can you elaborate on what effect reviews that you initiated in 2001 have had on the abscond rate from community custody centres as recorded on page 3-10 of the MPS?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank Mr Shine for the question. At the heart of this issue of community custody is one question. That question is: what are we hoping to achieve by having people locked away in a prison? Punishment? Certainly. Keeping the community safe from criminals? This, of course, is of paramount importance. But running alongside these issues is the fact that we want prisoners who return to the community not to reoffend. This makes a safer society for everyone.

The fact is that prisoners are far less likely to reoffend if they are given a graduated system of release. That is why we have community custody and largely it is a system which works well.

But no system is perfect. The number of prisoners breaching the trust placed in them is small and there is no leniency on those who break the rules. But the need to ensure community safety is my No. 1 concern. That is why I ordered a review of the community custody facilities in 2001. The department has effectively implemented recommended changes. For example, allocation and transfer decisions regarding prisoners have been centralised under the office of centre management. The performance of service providers is now closely monitored and the leave pass system for prisoners seeking employment has been tightened.

These changes are paying off. In the 2002-03 financial year, there were six absconds from community custody centres. This result is a marked improvement on the previous year when there were 29 absconds and on the 2001-02 year when there were eight. The marked reduction in absconds in the last two financial years shows the effectiveness of conducting reviews and implementing the recommendations notwithstanding the criticism from some people both in and out of the parliament.

Considering that over 220 prisoners were granted release to work during 2002-03, the prisoner absconds represent less than five per cent of the prisoners released into the community. This means that the vast majority are completing the program successfully, which is improving the likelihood of them reforming their ways and ending the cycle of offending.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Could I ask you to comment on any changes in the escape rate from Queensland correctional centres as referred to on page 3-10 of the MPS?

**Mr McGRADY:** Again, I thank Mrs Scott for the question. The government is committed to providing a safe and secure prison system. The security at these centres is vastly improved. Over the past five years there has not been one escape—not one escape—from a secure prison. In fact, the combined escape rate from secure, open and community custody centres for 2002-03 is 0.26 per cent—a rate that is the lowest in more than 20 years. That is a record that we have worked hard for and one which all of us at this table are proud of. All except one of these escaped prisoners has been recaptured. Most were returned to custody within hours or, indeed, days of their escape. During 2002-03, there were 13 escapes—down from 15 the previous year. These results are in stark contrast to the appalling record of the last year of the coalition, during which there were 41 escapes, some 13 of these from secure custody.

Improvements to security and a large-scale capital works program to build modern, state-of-the-art prisons has played a vital part in our good results. The community's safety is a vital goal and our efforts to ensure the security of the prison system reflects well on this. Those prisoners who escaped were immediately returned to a secure prison upon capture and charged accordingly.

Unfortunately, under the open custody system there is an element of trust. If that trust is broken, then we show no leniency at all. During the past six months a number of planned escapes from secure prisons have been prevented by the thorough work of department staff and I congratulate them on this work. Those inmates involved have been relocated to other prisons—these inmates I am referring to now who were planning this escape—and remain under close watch pending further investigations.

I have to say that I have visited the prison where this plan was discovered and some of the prisoners involved, had they escaped, would have posed a major threat to our community. But again, thanks to the good work and the good policing, if you like, of the Department of Corrective Services, we were able to prevent this plan coming to fruition. This happens on many occasions which the public do not always hear about, but I was so proud of the work and how they discovered this plan that I took the media into the maximum security of the prison to show them exactly what was being planned and how we foiled the plan.

**Mr LEE:** Can the minister elaborate on benefits associated with changes to the sex offender programs, which are referred to at page 3-19 of the MPS?

**Mr McGRADY:** I certainly will. I thank the member for the question. I believe—I think we can all assume—that the community believes that sex offences, particularly those against children, are amongst the most repugnant of all crimes. Mr Johnson raised this issue earlier. As I said then, I concur with everything he said about the perpetrators of these crimes. We introduced the Dangerous Prisoners (Sexual Offenders) Act just a few short weeks ago to ensure that sex offenders who are a great danger of re-offending or doing harm cannot be released. I have

directed the department to implement a series of measures to ensure that more prisoners in jail or under community supervision for sex offences undertake rehabilitation programs.

During 2002-03 I boosted the availability of sex offender programs through an expansion made possible through the diversion of \$100,000 which had been earmarked for travel, conferences, seminars and workshops. We scrapped them and spent \$100,000 on sex offender programs. I believe that it is important that we focus our resources where they are most needed, so the funds were removed from non-core areas like those conferences and applied to what prison should be about.

The department's sex offender programs are currently being revised and redeveloped as standalone units so that more offenders can access intervention strategies, which will contribute to safer communities. The main aims of this project are to increase the availability of interventions for sexual offenders; to develop clear and concise module manuals; to standardise assessment and referral processes; to incorporate evaluation, monitoring and data collection processes; and to develop a training package and supervision processes. We can do all of this but, as the old saying goes, you can take a horse to water but you can't make it drink. We can provide all of these avenues for those who are inside, but unless they show a willingness to participate—unless they want to be cured—a lot of this work we do just falls away.

I repeat: when an offender was released in January of this year, there was nothing at all that I as the prisons minister could do. He was walking out the gate and almost the whole of the community was saying, 'This person should not be allowed out.' Yet I had no powers to prevent that from happening. As a result of the legislation which we have now brought into this parliament, there is an avenue to prevent people from being released if it is the belief of the court that they would re-offend.

At the height of the debate I went into the prison and I sat down with five of these paedophiles. They said to me, 'Minister, if you released us tomorrow we would re-offend because we can't control our urges.' It is easy for people to say what you should do and what you should not do, but it is different when you actually see these people and they tell you themselves that there is nothing they can do. That is why I was delighted—I am one of few ministers to speak on another minister's bill—to support the legislation the government brought in recently. At least it gives us the opportunity to refer somebody who the authorities inside the prison believe has a fair chance of re-offending to the court for the court to decide whether that person is released.

**The CHAIR:** Minister, I refer you to page 3-13 of the MPS, where the types of community supervision are detailed. Can you inform the committee of any improvements which could be gained by examining practices in other countries in supervising offenders in the community?

**Mr McGRADY:** Thankyou for the question. I would be one of the meanest ministers, I am sure. Earlier I was gloating about saving \$100,000 from travel. At the height of this debate I asked one of the senior officers from the department if she would go to England and Scotland to study what is being done in the field there, because England and Scotland are regarded around the world as being the toughest on this sort of activity. I have received the report. I will ask that officer to come forward and, in the few minutes we have available, give a brief run-down of what she discovered and the difference between what is happening in the UK and Scotland and what used to happen here.

**Ms Sinclair:** As the minister has indicated, I made the trip to England and Scotland to have a look at what is happening in those two jurisdictions, particularly with regard to protecting the public from potential sex offenders and the re-offence rate of sex offenders. As the minister has said, those two jurisdictions are the best in the world with regard to having very good integrated initiatives that go from very strong and tough legislation right through to very targeted programs and a multiagency protection model, which means that all government agencies have a responsibility to protect the public. That includes health, housing, corrective services, police and social welfare. Virtually every agency must report on what they are doing with regard to changing their practices to make the community safer.

**Mr McGRADY:** That should demonstrate that it was not just a matter of sending somebody off on a junket. The UK and Scotland, as has been stated, appear to lead the way. There is a change of attitude. It is all about protecting the community as opposed to protecting the people inside. The report, as Gabrielle said, brings in health, housing and a whole series of other issues. It is not something you can discuss in five minutes. It is an excellent report. I will be taking it to my caucus committee and then hopefully a public debate will commence. Members of the committee should understand that we are taking the matter seriously. We have already demonstrated

through the new legislation that there is a change of emphasis. I hope that as a result of this report we will be able to make other changes in the months and years ahead.

**Mr SHINE:** I refer to page 3-9 of the MPS, which discusses amendments to the Corrective Services Act with a view to increasing the number of prisoners on the WORC outreach camp program. Have these changes been effective? Have there been any other changes which have enhanced this particular program?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question, because this is really one of the great success stories of prisons in Queensland. Mr Johnson has at least one camp in his electorate. He used to have two until I took over Winton from his electorate.

**Mr JOHNSON:** They are doing excellent work, too.

**Mr McGRADY:** They do. One of the problems we have with the WORC program is that every council wants one. We simply cannot do that. As you know, the WORC program was born out of the Charleville floods, when we used prisoners to go in and help with the clean-up. Low-risk prisoners are located in 11 of these WORC camps right across the outback. One of the problems we had was that, because of the legislation, only certain types of prisoners could participate in the scheme. We were not getting sufficient prisoners to actually meet the requirements of the communities. So where you would have a camp at, say, Julia Creek, which has a capacity of 12, we were having three and four prisoners.

After having some discussions with local government, the opposition—Mr Horan was the leader at the time—the department and everybody else we agreed to lift the bar to take in another class of prisoners. Just a few weeks ago I was at Julia Creek, where the prisoners had been used to help fit out a child-minding facility. All of the community were there and they asked me whether I would convey a special word of thanks to the prisoners. They were proud. Whether you talk to the prisoners or you talk to the community, you will find that they all say it is a great scheme. The prisoners go away with a far better understanding of what it is like to be out in the real world. Today we have 128 prisoners in those camps, which is a big increase on the number we had before the legislation came into effect.

There is a cost, of course. We have to run the camp. We have to pay the salaries of the people in charge of the camp. One of the big problems I discovered was that a tremendous amount of time was wasted in bringing prisoners back to Brisbane and sending them back again. We are now in the process of changing that so that prisoners will spend more time actually doing community work. This has been welcomed by the groups, because each community in which there is a camp has its own committee and they decide what work is going to be done. I did say that I do not necessarily want them going around cleaning the streets. I want them doing projects so that people can say, 'This was done by the WORC group in 1999,' or whatever. It is a great scheme and a tremendous success. The legislation we brought in, with the support of the opposition, is certainly working well.

**Mrs DESLEY SCOTT:** Minister, could you outline any Smart State initiatives that will assist the government to provide for safer and more supportive communities, particularly the integrated offender management system as referred to on page 3-9 of the MPS?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. The government is committed to the rehabilitation of offenders as a way that they can go out there and contribute to a safer community. To this end we have embarked on the development of an integrated offender management model to integrate assessment, planning and intervention activities across all areas of the prison.

Funding of just over \$9.5 million has been allocated over three years to develop this scheme. Simply, this means that a new computer system will put all of the information required about an offender in one place so that it can be easily accessed. Key benefits from this initiative include the provision of more accurate information to support the work of community corrections boards and more effective targeting of intervention programs based on offenders' assessed risks and needs. This will, for example, allow the department to enhance its ability to quickly identify high-risk offenders while they are still under our control and make necessary adjustments to their supervision. I believe that this will help to minimise the chances of early release for prisoners who are identified as posing a high risk of re-offending. That means a safer community. As we have all said tonight, this is what our policies are about.

This approach will also reduce duplication of admin effort and therefore boost productivity. Queensland is leading the way and is at the forefront of offender management strategies designed to reduce re-offending and enhance community safety. When it is developed, this

scheme will be using Microsoft's .NET technology program. Microsoft has contributed significant resources towards the project as part of this agreement with the department. I think this represents a tangible example of our commitment to a partnership with the private sector as part of the Smart State strategy. The system is expected to be in place by the middle of next year.

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

**Mr JOHNSON:** I refer the minister to page 3-9 of the MPS under 'Recent achievements' which notes the development of the business support system—the integrated offender management system. Minister, is this the same project that you referred to earlier this year that will provide a world-class computer system to track offenders through the system and minimise the chances of high-risk prisoners being given early release? Can you advise the committee when this will be in place?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. As I have said many times today, we are committed to the rehabilitation of offenders as a way to contribute to safer communities. We have embarked on the development and implementation of the plan which I referred to before, and I repeat again: it is a key initiative of the department.

There are many ways we can go in trying to improve the schemes that we currently have inside the prison system. That is one of the reasons why we keep a check on what is happening overseas and in other jurisdictions. It is also important to understand the reason why ministers and directors-general meet from time to time to exchange ideas.

This scheme which I referred to just before will also ensure that staff have ready access to all the relevant information which is required. You referred before to child sex offenders. This scheme which we are talking about now will assist in the way in which we can identify people who we believe could pose a risk to the community if they are released. So the answer to your question is yes.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, I refer to the output statements on page 3-10, 3-15 and 3-21, where I have counted a total of 16 targets that were unmet in 2002-03 across Corrective Services. Can you advise the committee whether your director-general or the acting director-general received their performance bonus for the financial year just completed?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. The department's chief executives are appointed by the Governor in Council, as you would know being a former minister. By virtue of section 53, each CEO is required to enter into a written contract of employment with the Premier. The contract covers such matters as term of employment and remuneration. The contract also requires the CEO to enter into a performance agreement with the Premier. The Premier announced on Sunday, 7 July that the payment of performance bonuses will not continue past existing contractual arrangements. This is all I am prepared to say. Any questions about the employment of CEOs, their performance agreements or performance bonuses should be directed to the Premier as their employer.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, on page 3-19 of the MPS, you have listed as an achievement the delivery of an additional 10 sex offender programs in community corrections in 2002-03, up from five programs in 2001-02. Can you advise at which of Queensland's 10 correctional facilities an offender could participate in these treatment programs? Are all of these 10 programs operating at present?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. There are a number of these programs in various prisons around the state. First of all, what we have done is train our staff who will be supervising these programs. The department provided three, two-week intensive training courses for staff to facilitate the sex offender and the community's sex offender treatment programs. Thirty-nine community and custodial correctional professional staff have completed their training, which was conducted both here in Brisbane and in Townsville. Consequently, every community correctional region and every mail security centre now has staff trained in the delivery of the programs which you have referred to.

A facilitator training program which focused on specialised sexual violence intervention to meet the needs of offenders whose offences were mid-range in seriousness and included violence was also delivered. This special program—Sex Offender Intervention Program (Violence)—is less intensive than the 12- to 18-month program and addresses violence issues more thoroughly. Fourteen community and custodial correctional professional staff have now been trained in the delivery of this Sex Offender Intervention Program (Violence). Eleven staff at the Capricornia Correctional Centre have also been trained in running the department's innovative

Indigenous Sex Offender Treatment Program. Following its successful trial at Townsville last year, this program was expanded to Capricornia and commenced in June this year.

My understanding—and I will ask the acting director-general to confirm this—is that there is the Sex Offender Intervention Program, which is available at Capricornia, Wolston, Lotus Glen, Townsville and Palen Creek. The Sex Offender Intervention Program (Violence) is available at Woodford, Sir David Longland and Borallon. The Sex Offender Treatment Program is available at Wolston. The Indigenous Sex Offender Treatment Program, as I mentioned, is available at Capricornia and Townsville, and the Community Sex Offender Program is available in all the regions.

Mr Chairman, if you would like me to give you the details of the duration of those programs and the groups that these programs target, I am more than happy to do so. I think I have answered your question about the centres at which the programs are available.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Thank you, Minister. Again referring to the 10 sex offender programs that were in place during 2002-03, what was the actual total cost of running all programs over the last financial year as well as the actual total cost of an offender successfully completing a program?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. The budget this year is \$1.286 million and that is a decrease on the previous year—and I am being honest with you here. Last year we spent \$1.3 million. This year we spent \$1.28 million, and the decrease is mainly due to the one-off cost of rewriting sex offender programs, which cost \$94,000. So you have some costs one year which do not have to be repeated the following year. In answer to your question, it is \$1.286 million. Would you like to add to that, Elizabeth?

**Ms Davidson:** The development of the modularisation project, as the minister has explained, will assist us to allow more prisoners to access programs. The programs will be stand-alone units. So, if a prisoner has a difficulty with a particular aspect of a program, they will be able to repeat just that part of the program rather than having to repeat the whole program. That is the cost that the minister has referred to.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Thank you very much. I refer the minister to page 3-8 of the MPS, which mentions that all facilities provide opportunities for offenders to participate in education, employment, vocational training and programs designed to assist in addressing their offending behaviour. I recently received some correspondence expressing concern about the continuation of prison support programs—in particular, budget cuts for chaplaincy services. Can you advise which support programs and services have had their budgets cut back and what is the budgeted figure for prison support programs for 2003-04? How does this compare with the budget in actual figures for 2002-03?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for the question. It is a relevant and sensible question. I think in government what we have to do from time to time is examine where we are spending money. We always get requests from individuals and organisations for new schemes. We just referred to them before in the sex offender programs. There is a cost involved. From time to time I believe it is important that we examine exactly whom we are funding and where the money is going.

The problem we have is that there are some organisations which will tell us what they will sell us. The reality is that the Department of Corrective Services actually buys services from people. Whether it is the chaplaincy, whether it is transport for the families of prisoners, there is a whole series of areas which we fund.

What I have said is let us examine whether or not all those services are relevant today. As I said a moment ago, we are always keen to improve the services and to spend more money. People call upon governments to keep on spending money—more money than we did the year before. Some people judge our performance by what the increase is, and yet all too often we forget to examine whether or not the services that are being provided are relevant.

What we have done is invite those organisations and others to bid for what we want. Some people will say, 'We have to give you this service seven days a week.' Hold on, we do not require it seven days a week; we require it four days a week. That is what we are doing. In answer to your question, no organisation yet has had its funding reduced. But I have to be honest with you: last year we spent \$702,000. This year I believe we can make savings, and we have decreased that amount to \$440,000. I am hoping to make a saving, but I have to say to you when the information comes back to us and we cannot make a saving then we will employ these people.

As the purchaser of services, it is our right to say whether or not we require the services; not to be told by the customer that we are going to give you this service whether you think you require

it or not. That is the answer to the question. Sure, there has been a reduction in the budget. No organisation yet has actually been informed that its amounts have been reduced. As I said before, the chaplaincy is part of that. As to whether chaplains are providing a service seven days a week, I do not know. Maybe it is six, maybe it is five. I do not know. But that will all be discussed when the applications come in for funding.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Minister, I refer to your response to my question on notice No. 4 for estimates which reported that a total of 41 audits were undertaken during 2002-03 by the Internal Audit Unit for the Department of Corrective Services. Minister, how many recommendations put forward by the Internal Audit Unit have you implemented in full?

**Mr McGRADY:** Again, I thank the member for the question. Departmental audits have resulted in allegations of official misconduct in criminal charges. I have advised the committee in answer to the question which you mentioned a moment ago that we did conduct 41 internal audits. I have been advised by the department that none of these audits has resulted in any allegations of misconduct or matters of criminal behaviour and none are currently under investigation.

Again, I have the information here. We have 13 of financial compliance, and the key findings of those highlighted a need to review and clarify a number of departmental procedures within the financial management practice manual. A number of areas need to improve documentation. There are 12 on information systems, one on monitoring audits and 15 on operations. The acting director-general may wish to comment on that.

**Mr Rule:** The audits that the minister has referred to are completed audits. Our process is that they are referred back to management for those recommendations to be implemented. Many of those audits are recent audits in relation to auditing for the department's annual financial statement at the end of the 2002-03 financial year, and many of those remedies are still being put in place at this time. I do not have the exact details with me this evening as to how many of them are fully complete, but I can assure you that the department's strategic audit and risk committee provides a governance structure for ensuring that those audits are all fully completed and signed off.

**Mr JOHNSON:** Can you furnish us with the details that you do not have available?

**Mr McGRADY:** No problems at all.

**Mr BELL:** Minister, I refer to page 3-8 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement where it is stated that in the year 2002-03 there were four so-called unnatural deaths in custody. Nothing is said about natural deaths in custody, and I would submit that if there were an abnormal number of so-called natural deaths in custody that would be a possible matter of concern also. How many natural deaths occurred in the year 2002-03 in custody? Was there any coronial inquiry into any of these deaths to ensure that they really were natural deaths?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank you for the question. Of the deaths in custody, for one death the causes were unknown. Then there was an unnatural death which was a suicide. There was another suicide. Then there was another suicide, making three suicides. There was a natural death where the prisoner's carer woke to find that the prisoner had died some time through the night. It appears the prisoner had a history of heart related diseases so it is assumed that he died of heart problems. There was another death, which is a natural death, from a medical condition. The prisoner was in a part of the prison. He passed away. He was checked and it was discovered that he had suffered from a number of problems so they stated it was a natural death. Then there was another suicide.

There are four suicides. The natural death occurred at the Princess Alexandra Hospital. There is one death for which the cause of death was unknown, although the prisoner did have a medical condition. I do not want to name names.

**Mr BELL:** No, I am not asking for that, Minister, thank you. I have another question, very quickly. I refer to page 3-15 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement where it is stated that the cost of supervision services per offender per day is down from \$7.63 to \$7.20. What is the reason for this happy reduction in cost?

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Bell, I thank you for that question. As you stated, with regard to the cost per prisoner per day, I am pleased to advise the committee that the results are very close to the original estimations and the estimates for next year reflect an improved performance. This information reflects the cost per prisoner per day in accordance with the department's approved output structure. Overheads and other indirect costs such as the corporate costs are included in

the cost per prisoner. The cost associated with interventions, programs, vocational and educational training are not included in the figures which you were quoting.

Of course, all states are interested in comparing these costs and do so by referring to figures produced by the Productivity Commission in the report on government services. The most recent figures available indicate that Queensland is performing favourably in this area. However, it should be noted that the method of calculating the information by the commission is different than that which is used by the department for the MPS. You are not comparing apples with apples.

**Mr BELL:** But in Queensland will there be any reduction in the quality of the supervision service?

**Mr McGRADY:** No, there will be no reduction of quality, quite the contrary because, as I mentioned before, we have opened up a new prison and some of our prisons are quite state of the art. There is certainly no reduction in the quality of service which prisoners are receiving.

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

**Mr LEE:** Can the minister elaborate on Queensland's rate of offenders returning to custody within two years as referred to at page 3-13 of the MPS. Also, how does this compare with other states?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank Mr Lee for the question. In fact, this is an area where Queensland is really leading the pack compared with the other states. One of the best ways to reduce crime and improve safety is to make sure that offenders who end up within the Corrective Services system can be rehabilitated. There are a variety of ways that this is done including providing education, work skills and rehabilitation programs. A graduated system of release is also a key way to slowly integrate prisoners back into society from secure prisons to open custody, then release-to-work, the WORC program as we discussed a little while back, or community corrections.

The report on government services for 2003 found that Queensland achieved the lowest rate of ex-offenders returning to community corrections after completing a community corrections order with a rate of 9.4 per cent, far below the national average of 18.9 per cent. The report also found that Queensland has the second lowest percentage of ex-prisoners returning to prison with 31.6 per cent. This compares favourably with the national average of 37.4 per cent for the same period. We also achieved the lowest rate of returns to either community corrections or prisons for ex-offenders completing a community order in 1999-2000. At this time Queensland's rate was 14.7 per cent compared with the national average of 24.5 per cent. These are results which we are proud of and which certainly show that our commitment to rehabilitation of prisoners is paying off in helping offenders to break out of the crime cycle and become productive members of the community.

**Mr SHINE:** With reference to page 3-4 of the MPS, can the minister detail what benefits the government's ongoing support for the urinalysis program offers?

**Mr McGRADY:** I thank the member for the question. As we have said a number of times today, drugs represent one of the greatest evils in our society. The link between drugs and crime is indisputable. It is a terrible truth that these substances can turn a good person to a life of crime. It is vitally important that we ensure that offenders in community situations who are vulnerable to the lure of drugs can stay clean, otherwise they will go back to using and straight back to crime.

Drug testing enhances community safety by identifying and managing illicit drug use by offenders who are being supervised in the community. In 2003-04 we have allocated \$1.7 million to continue this program which provides authorities with information to take immediate action. This initiative directly impacts upon the level of drug dependency and criminal activity in the community. It reduces health risks to the community and it reduces pressure on the police, courts and, of course, the correctional system by ensuring early detection of drug use and taking immediate corrective action.

Funding has been allowed for the provision of drug testing facilities at a number of area offices. We have staff training, the purchase of drug testing products and the operation of an additional mobile drug testing van. Offenders subject to drug testing are those with a special urinalysis testing requirement on their court order or post-release community based order. Approximately 10 per cent of all community based orders currently have this requirement. During May, 585 drug tests were performed under this initiative. Approximately 70 per cent of area offices now have in-house drug testing facilities and those which do not can make use of mobile facilities. Some 21 additional full-time operational staff have been recruited and staff are trained

to undertake on-site drug testing. A mobile drug testing van in south-east Queensland conducts drug testing of offenders both inside and outside of business hours.

This is one way that we can check that people who are out on those various releases are clean. If they do not turn up for their regular inspection they can be breached which means they are back behind bars. That is the way it has to be.

**The CHAIR:** Thankyou, minister.

There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the Estimates of the Minister for Police and Corrective Services and the Minister Assisting the Premier on the Carpentaria Minerals Province. I thank the minister and the portfolio officers for their attendance.

Before they leave I remind them that the transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the *Hansard* web site within two hours from now. Further, this also concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 6 June.

I would like to thank my fellow members of Estimates Committee B and all those parliamentary officers who have assisted with the conduct of this hearing. I now declare this—

**Mr McGRADY:** Mr Chair, before you do close the meeting, could I thank you for the very professional way in which you have conducted this hearing. I know you have had a long day, as have your committee members, but I think it has been conducted in a very professional way. To the members of the committee, I thank them all for the questions they have asked because this is what democracy is all about. It is only a few short years that we have had this system in this state, but I think it is important that ministers, at least once a year outside of question time in the parliament, are forced to face a committee such as this to demonstrate what they have been doing and, more importantly, the explain new policies and their finances and how the money is being spent in their particular departments.

Having praised the committee and yourself, Mr Chair, and the parliament House staff—they do an excellent job—can I say that being a minister, and Mr Johnson would be aware of this, the actual burden which this places on ministerial staff and departmental staff is quite large. They work on this for at least three months. This is the conclusion of a long, drawn out battle to get the minister all the information. I can sit here, as other ministers do, and we can pass out the information and answer the questions, but if it was not for the back up of our own personal staff and also the department staff it would be a very, very difficult task.

Mr Chair, can I have those comments recorded in *Hansard* because I think it is important that we acknowledge the work that people do other than the minister himself or herself.

Can I just elaborate on a question which Mr Johnson asked?

**The CHAIR:** Certainly.

**Mr McGRADY:** I have just had word now that checks have been made on the *Government Gazette*. The oldest *Government Gazette* that can be accessed is that for 20 June. But the human resources staff of the department are not aware of any vacancies or advertisements as claimed by you. The executive director of custodial corrections has confirmed that he has not exercised his delegation to request the filling of any general manager position. Any positions if advertised on 13 June, as claimed, would now be closed for applications. The department received no inquiries and nor has it received any applications for general manager positions. Will you accept that as the answer to your question?

**Mr JOHNSON:** Yes. Can I say in conclusion, as the shadow spokesman for police and corrective services, that I thank you, Minister, your police officers, the commissioner and his understudies, and also you, Mr Chair, and your staff for the professional way in which you have conducted the hearing. I thank you for that.

**The CHAIR:** I now declare this public hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 7 p.m.