

WEDNESDAY, 13 JULY 2005

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS

Estimates Committee F Members

Mr Al McNamara (Chair)
Mr GB Fenlon
Mr SA Knuth
Mr JD O'Brien
Miss EM Roberts
Miss FS Simpson
Mr GJ Wilson

In Attendance

Hon. PT Lucas, Minister for Transport and Main Roads

Queensland Rail

Mr B Scheuber, Chief Executive Officer

Queensland Transport

Mr B Wilson, Director-General

Mr D Hunt, Deputy Director-General

Ms H Stehbens, Executive Director, Rail Ports and Freight

Ms C Brunjes, Director, Finance

Department of Main Roads

Mr A Tesch, Director-General (Acting)

Ms D Anderson, General Manager, Corporate Services

Mr B Drew, Executive Director, South East Queensland

Mrs K Peut, Executive Director, Roads Program

Committee met at 8.29 am

CHAIR: Good morning, everyone. I declare this hearing of Estimates Committee F now open. On behalf of the committee I welcome Minister Paul Lucas, departmental officers and members of the public to the hearing. I would like to introduce the members of the committee. I am Andrew McNamara, member for Hervey Bay, the chair of the committee; Miss Fiona Simpson, the member for Maroochydore, is the deputy chair; the other committee members are Mr Gary Fenlon, member for Greenslopes; Mr Shane Knuth, member for Charters Towers; Mr Jason O'Brien, member for Cook; Miss Elisa Roberts, member for Gympie; and Mr Geoff Wilson, member for Ferny Grove.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2005 for the areas set out in the order of appointment dated 11 May 2005. The committee will examine the organisational units in the following order: the departments of Transport and Main Roads, the departments of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and then the Department of Energy. The committee will suspend proceedings for the following breaks: morning tea from 10 till 10.15 am, another break from 11.45 to 11.50 am, lunch from 12.50 till 1.50 pm, afternoon tea from 3.50 until 4 pm and then a final break from 5.30 till 5.45 pm.

I remind all of those participating in the hearing today that these proceedings are similar to parliament to the extent that the public cannot participate in the proceedings. In this regard I remind members of the public that under the standing orders the public may be admitted to or excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the committee. The committee has resolved that television footage without sound be allowed for the opening statements by the chair and the minister. I ask that any mobile phones or pagers be switched off or switched to silent mode.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute. Answers are to be no longer than three minutes. A single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. Sessional orders require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

The committee has given leave for non-committee members to ask ministers questions. The following persons will also be participating in today's hearing on this basis: Dr Bruce Flegg, the member for Moggill; Mr Vaughan Johnson, the member for Gregory; Ms Rosemary Menkens, the member for Burdekin and Mr Jeff Seeney, the member for Callide. I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the departments of Transport and Main Roads open for examination. The time allocated is three hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, if you wish to make an opening statement please do so now. If you wish to split your statement for Transport and Main Roads there will still be a five-minute total for that statement. Thank you.

Mr LUCAS: Thank you, Mr Chair. Good morning, Mr Chair and committee members. I thank you for the opportunity to be here today. Queensland is facing many challenges. With more than 1,000 people moving here each week, we need to plan now and for the future. Transport will play an increasingly important role in the future of Queensland. Our greatest challenge is to provide a transport system that will meet the expected growth of a state that is the second largest in area, the third largest in population. We have transport plans and visions. They are our working blueprints for the future. We are putting infrastructure in place now that will take us well into the future, and we have a good, solid budget to back it up.

The 2005-06 state budget delivers an operating budget of \$3 billion for the Transport and Main Roads portfolio—a \$3 billion investment in our future growth and prosperity. It also provides a record \$2.83 billion for capital investment works injected into roads, rail, public transport and port infrastructure; \$1.58 billion for Queensland Transport, Rail and ports; and \$1.25 billion for Main Roads. That is an increase of \$484 million or 44 per cent for Queensland Transport, Rail and ports and \$440 million or 54 per cent for Main Roads on last year's budget, and a 57 per cent increase in the state-funded regional roads programs in the 1997-98 budget under the coalition. The \$3 billion portfolio operating budget includes \$1.8 billion for Queensland Transport and \$1.2 billion for Main Roads. The Beattie government is determined to deliver the best possible transport outcomes for all Queenslanders. We will work with the private sector, the community and with other levels of government on the planning and management of our road network.

I would like to say at the outset that much has been said about stone mastic asphalt and its use on Queensland roads—some mischievous, some mistaken. When safety concerns about SMA were first brought to my attention, I acted swiftly and openly. I ordered a safety audit into that section of the highway around Federal. As a result of preliminary findings, I commissioned a broader investigation and appointed two independent experts widely acknowledged and accepted as leaders in their field. It must be said that SMA is not a cheap alternative: it is 30 to 40 per cent more expensive and it is not something unique to Queensland. It is used extensively and safely throughout Europe and the US. It is also used in Victoria and New South Wales.

Investigators identified a number of contributing factors in the tragic accident near Federal in May. It should not be said that stone mastic asphalt on the road surface was solely responsible for the accident. Spurious claims by the opposition about SMA have only served to cause unnecessary angst in the community. They have behaved recklessly and irresponsibly. I also instructed my director-general to make available all documentation on stone mastic asphalt held by Main Roads for the independent reviewer. Queensland has seen a 23 per cent reduction in our fatality rate per 100,000 since 1997, and we have given a commitment to work harder to reduce it further.

Now some comments about Queensland Transport. With me today is my director-general, Bruce Wilson, my deputy director-general, Dan Hunt, and also Helen Stehbens, executive director, rail, ports and freight, and Bob Scheuber, CEO of QR. Queensland Transport operates in a challenging environment. On the one hand, south-east Queensland has the highest population growth of any urban area in Australia and that is the impetus for our South-East Queensland Regional Plan.

Mr Chair, there was just one issue in relation to questions on notice that I wanted to raise. How would you like me to do that?

CHAIR: Just put it.

Mr LUCAS: I would just like to add some additional information to the answer I provided to the non-government question on notice number 6 regarding rail incidents. The answer I provided—that Queensland has not had any train passenger or employee fatalities since 1985—targeted fatalities resulting from train crashes and it should therefore have said that Queensland has not had any train passenger or employee fatalities since 1985 as a result of a train crash. In fact, the last train crash resulting in a passenger or employee fatality occurred in 1985 at Trinder Park. A small number of other fatalities have occurred associated with train operations since 1985 but not resulting from train crashes. One other passenger fatality has occurred since that time in 1993 as the ultimate result of a woman getting caught in train doors at Altandi station. There have been no employee fatalities as a result of train operations since the time of rail safety accreditation in 1997. I just wanted to clarify that. QR's safety record remains the envy of the rest of Australia.

CHAIR: Thank you, minister. I might just ask the research director to note that little bit of time. We will equalise that in terms of taking it off government members' time for asking questions. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. I call the member for Maroochydoore.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Good morning, Minister.

Mr LUCAS: Good morning.

Miss SIMPSON: First of all, Minister, I note that last year you failed to provide answers to questions on notice to this estimates committee in a timely way, and once again you have failed to provide questions in a timely way. I want it noted for the record that the opposition has concerns that you seek to use objects, gadgets and props for today's estimates, which we do not approve of because they do not assist the written *Hansard* process.

Mr LUCAS: How would you know before you have seen them?

Miss SIMPSON: I also want to note that, Minister, if you have so much time to put together your props for estimates, why can you not get your questions on notice in on time to this estimates process and treat it with due respect?

Mr LUCAS: I am happy to take that question, Mr Chairman. I thank the honourable member for her question. The honourable member ought be aware of the fact that the standing orders make a number of provisions in relation to the asking of questions. One of those provisions is that they ought not be multifaceted and multiparted. The honourable member repeatedly ignores that and repeatedly asks questions that are an abuse of process. It, of course, takes longer periods of time to even attempt to source the information than it does for other questions. What I do, Mr Chairman, is provide the best possible information that I can in relation to those questions which is consistent with the standing orders but, of course, as I said, I would have been entitled to refuse to answer most of the questions that the honourable member has framed.

In relation to presentations and the like, Mr Speaker has made his position extremely clear in relation to the matter. I wrote, of course, to Mr Chair in relation to this some time ago, indicating that I would propose to use visual and other aids for the purpose of elucidating for the committee. We are not in 1859 when Queensland was first proclaimed as a state; we are in 2005. For example, I have a computer screen in front of me that now serves a role to help members. Audiovisual aids are increasingly seen as a way of helping demonstrate points. We have a committee that is drawn from throughout Queensland—various parts of Queensland—and whilst the honourable member for Cook would have an outstanding appreciation of roads in his electorate, and also the member for Gympie might have an outstanding appreciation of roads in her electorate, I would bet that they would not know in intimate detail natures of roads in each other's electorates other than in general terms. That is why, of course, it serves to be able to illustrate points by way of audiovisual or other methods.

One of the things, for example, that I am particularly passionate about, Mr Chairman, is the issue of fibre composites. I hope that if I am asked a question about fibre composites I could demonstrate to committee members the absolute difference between the strength of tensile materials, fibre composites and other materials. I do not think that is an unreasonable thing to do in a modern age. It is extremely important that we have that facility but it surprises me somewhat that the honourable member would make a judgment about the materials before she has actually seen them. That seems to me to be prejudging it, and I really wonder what her concern is about seeing material that otherwise makes it more helpful for the committee to determine its attitude to the expenditure that is before it.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, my first question I will put to you but I will answer the question you have put to me. It is about translating the material into *Hansard*. Maps do not come over the radio terribly well and they certainly do not—

Mr LUCAS: I am happy to take that. Is that the question?

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the non-government question on notice no. 3 regarding details of taxpayer funds spent on conferences and workshops and note your advice that department financial systems do not permit you to answer the question asked. Minister, this information has been readily available in the past. Does that mean that you are just going to require the opposition to obtain this information through freedom of information requests at taxpayer expense?

Mr LUCAS: I am instructed, Mr Chairman, that the information provided by my department is provided consistently with how it has been provided previously, but I will say this: as I indicated, sessional order 26 states that a minister may refuse to answer questions which place unreasonable research requirements on their portfolios or which are unnecessarily complex. The honourable member asked a question about training sessions. We have about 3,500 people each in Main Roads and QT. QR has 12,500 people. We spend about two per cent of our salaries and wages on training, and I would hope that we would do that. I make no apology for doing that. Does the honourable member think it is feasible that I have all of the districts go through each ledger item to inquire as to what employee went where, who did Word training, who did PowerPoint training—that is the nature of her question—who did roadworker safety, project management and cultural diversity training? That is the nature of the broad question that you asked and it clearly indicates that you do not understand the nature of a diverse portfolio that values training very, very highly. One of the things I should indicate is that training is something that never finishes. You never reach the ultimate point of training. It is a matter of making sure that you continually update yourself in terms of best practice, and I make no apology for my agencies doing all that they can to further training.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to MPS 1-11 in relation to the investigation of the tilt train derailment on 16 November 2004. I note that this document states that a final report will be completed 'in the latter part of 2005.' Minister, can you confirm that the drivers have been interviewed and that breath tests were administered to the crew at the time of the accident?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The first point I want to make in relation to the tilt train is this: the safety record of QR in relation to its rail operations is outstanding. The design of the carriages and other material in relation to the tilt train speaks for themselves in relation to the results of the accident.

At the time that the accident happened, I made it very, very clear the way that I wanted to proceed. I did not just appoint a QT safety investigation. I appointed a joint Commonwealth chaired safety investigation in relation to the tilt train issue. We not only did that. We also changed the legislation to provide the maximum scope for this investigation to get to the bottom of the issue and to make sure that in the future, in so far as they are preventable, these sorts of accidents do not occur again.

Indeed, whilst the honourable member may have some views about it, those views do not echo the views of the former Deputy Prime Minister and federal minister for transport. I am trying to remember the publication—I think it was the Australasian Railway Association magazine—in which he specifically commended the Queensland government on how it proceeded in relation to the investigation into the tilt train accident.

In relation to the tilt train accident, because it is being investigated by an independent inquiry, they will reach their conclusions in a manner that is appropriate to them. We expect that to be at the end of this year, but I am not going to be dictating timing to them. The only thing I will say is that I want a proper job, not a rush job. In the meantime we have taken a number of precautions. The tilt train is operating at a maximum of 100 kilometres an hour. We continue our rollout of ATP. ATP was due to be trialed in one of the further manifestations in the week following the accident. Also, in July QR announced that it has now perfected the operation of ATP on the Rockhampton tilt train. We would hope that by the middle of next year it will then be perfected in relation to the Cairns tilt train as well.

I cannot recall and I do not have the information with me as to whether the police breathalysed the drivers at the time. I will just ask Bob Scheuber to provide that information.

Mr Scheuber: As members would be aware, both drivers were injured and the first thing is to look after drivers' injuries. But they were tested later and were found to be negative.

Miss SIMPSON: How much later?

Mr Scheuber: I cannot answer that question exactly, but they were tested.

Mr LUCAS: That is a matter for the police, of course. They are the first people at the accident.

Miss SIMPSON: There is actually a time frame involved that they have to be tested by, is there not?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, but that is a matter for police. When the police attend an accident scene—I am happy to take this question.

CHAIR: I advise that additional questions which interrupt the answer are additional questions and the minister gets three minutes.

Mr LUCAS: When the police attend an accident scene there are certain time limits for the purpose of prosecutions relating to drink-driving, for want of a better term. Any information that they receive more generally I would imagine would be available to the safety investigation team. But I am not aware of any issues being raised in terms of the alcohol level in the drivers at that particular point in time. I tell you now that QR takes a very strong view when it comes to alcohol or the impaired operation of trains and, indeed, QR adopts a nil alcohol policy at work. It applies to the CEO in the same way that it applies to everybody else. I am fully supportive of QR in relation to its very strong views on that. We

will see what the investigation ultimately comes up with. I certainly am not aware that there is any alcohol issue in relation to that. I am happy to make some further inquiries in relation to that and get back to the honourable member.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you, Minister. I will take that on notice that you are going to get back to us on that point.

Mr LUCAS: Insofar as I can secure that information. It may be that it is worth while having a chat to the police as well.

Miss SIMPSON: That will be supplied as part of this estimates process?

Mr LUCAS: Insofar as can I secure it.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, in relation to the investigation of the tilt train derailment, can you advise if any automated safety systems have been fitted to the diesel tilt trains and if these systems were in operation at the time of the smash?

Mr LUCAS: I will get more detail from Bob Scheuber from QR, but I indicated earlier that ATP, automatic train protection, was not operational in relation to the Cairns tilt train at that point in time. That is why two drivers are present in the cab. The fact is that an accident occurred—

Miss SIMPSON: So these systems were not in operation in diesel tilt trains at the time of the smash?

Mr LUCAS: They had not been commissioned. If I might finish my answer—

CHAIR: Just restart it, Minister.

Mr LUCAS: They are certainly designed with a view to making provision for ATP. That is one of the reasons why QR is in the progressive process of rolling it out. I have to say—and the honourable member should note this very carefully—that, with the exception of the Hammersley iron ore network in north-west Western Australia, there is no other rural and regional rail system that currently has ATP fitted. That is what I am told by QR. ATP is fitted in relation to our freight operations on that line, up as far as Purono just north of Townsville, and it was a part of driver-only services being commissioned. At the time, as I indicated previously, ATP was in the process of continuing its commissioning test with the full cooperation of drivers and the like. The problem is, of course, that we operate—unique from other rail systems—a freight, a passenger, a high speed and a normal speed, for want of a better word, rail network, which makes some of the commissioning details more challenging.

We now have ATP on the Bundaberg and Rocky tilt trains, operational since 8 July. By mid 2006 we will have it operational, we believe, in relation to the Cairns tilt train. So it was an appropriate situation concerning two drivers being in the cabin. But the fact is that the accident occurred. What we want to ensure is that, regardless of what may have caused things to go wrong, as far as possible we do not repeat it in the future. I should say this: our derailments have reduced by 59 per cent over the last five years and our level crossing accidents have decreased by 16 per cent over the last five years. QR has an outstanding safety record but any derailment or any accident in particular is a concern. That is why we are continuing with our work to fit ATP, and that is very important to us.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to page 1-3 of the MPS to the departmental overview regarding rail, ports and aviation systems. I refer to the role of coordinating transport policy. I note that in the documentation provided about the recently released South East Queensland Regional Plan there is reference to a key rail freight initiative including the expansion of capacity of the Acacia Ridge terminal and an increase of capacity to the Port of Brisbane through the metropolitan network. Can you confirm that you were in support of that strategy of increasing freight traffic through the suburban network?

Mr LUCAS: I am extremely concerned that as a shadow transport spokesperson you would plumb to these depths because I will tell you who is most affected at the present time by freight capacity constraints into Brisbane: people who vote for you—grain and coal producers on the Darling Downs. They are the people who are currently affected by rail capacity constraints because what we do is give priority to urban passenger operations, which we should do. So you want me to knock back improving freight capacity into Brisbane, which I think is frankly disgraceful, and I am more than happy to point out to people on the Darling Downs that that is what you think—you even think it is humorous.

Some of the things that we are going to do as part of this improvement in freight capacity are of significant benefit to people in urban Brisbane. For example, what we will do is we will continuously weld and concrete sleeper the narrow-gauge tracks between Dutton Park and Lytton Junction. What does that mean? That means that we can go from a 15¾ tonne axle limit to a 20-tonne axle load. What does that mean? That means that we can now take 2800 class diesel locomotives. What is so good about them? They are significantly quieter than other locomotives. What does that mean? That means that people, for example, in the electorate of Greenslopes have quieter diesels going past. It also means that because it is concrete sleepered it can be continuously welded. If it is continuously welded, then the clickety clack of trains going over the track is eliminated. They are very important initiatives. So, yes, I do. But let us talk about the longer term aspects of it.

The South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan also makes provision for the study of the Ebenezer to the standard gauge corridor—in other words, instead of having movements on the Brisbane urban network to bring them around to the main line at Acacia Ridge by a corridor south. We will do the study for that. Ultimately, that is a question for the economics of it. Secondly, I have engaged in a number of discussions with the mining industry in relation to the investigation of what I would call the southern missing link, Theodore-Wandoan. Might I have an extension?

Miss SIMPSON: It is going to impede the next question I want to ask the minister.

Mr LUCAS: So you do not want to hear the answer.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer again to page 1-3 of the MPS to the departmental overview regarding rail, ports and aviation systems. I table a letter signed by Peter Beattie as Leader of the Opposition dated 8 August 1997, which states—

I think it is incumbent on me to publicly state in writing my commitment that on returning to government Labor will ensure that a freight rail corridor is not built through the southern suburbs of Brisbane—

Mr LUCAS: That is right.

Miss SIMPSON: He goes on—

And I would be pleased if you could pass on that cast iron guarantee in writing to any residents of the area who make contact with you.

Minister, do you stand by that cast iron guarantee or not?

Mr LUCAS: It would be handy if the honourable member actually took the time to inform herself in relation to issues concerning rail corridors in south-east Queensland. I would have been more than happy to brief her in relation to them. The honourable member would be aware that the letter is written to Terry Mackenroth, the member for Chatsworth, and it is in relation to the potential use of the Gateway corridor for a freight rail line. It has nothing, nothing, nothing—and I will say it again if you do not understand it—nothing to do with rail freight capacity improvements in relation to the rest of south-east Queensland. Indeed, the issue of Ebenezer to Bromelton is way south of Brisbane in terms of any population areas. Why would the Premier have written a letter to Terry Mackenroth about Bromelton? Really the honourable member should understand that. That is the context in which it was written and the Premier's and the Deputy Premier's undertaking still stands. I would be a very brave minister if I pitched up to the Premier and Deputy Premier something that was against what they had promised, and that will not be happening. Might I have an extension, please?

CHAIR: It is up to the questioner.

Miss SIMPSON: We are out of time.

CHAIR: Time for non-government questions has expired. Perhaps we will do it on our side. Honourable members should be aware that I advised at the beginning that Dr Bruce Flegg would be joining us. Dr Bruce Flegg sent through advice that he has been unable to secure agreement with non-government members regarding an allocation of time for asking questions, so he wishes to apologise and advises that he will not be joining us this morning. Minister, I ask you to complete your answer to the previous question before I ask the first question by the government.

Mr LUCAS: Clearly the context of it is such that it relates to the Gateway corridor and anyone with any understanding of the history of it, including Vaughan Johnson if the honourable member had bothered to ask him, would understand that. But what we are doing in the future is advancing the interests of what we call the southern missing link that provides the opportunity for us to freight coal up to Gladstone and out through the Wiggins Island terminal should that be feasible to build. Additionally, we have protected the corridor for an improved rail corridor between Brisbane and Toowoomba. That will also benefit passengers if that corridor is able to be built. It is extremely expensive but we are cooperating very strongly with the federal government in relation to the Brisbane-Melbourne rail corridor. So, presumably, the honourable member also believes that we should not have any freight coming into south-east Queensland as a result of the Brisbane-Melbourne rail corridor. If she wants to employ this sort of North Korean view of how you engage people outside your borders, that is her business. I think the reason our economy is booming so much is that we have such dynamic growth and part of that is actually trading with people.

CHAIR: Minister, I want to take you to pages 1-11 and 1-15 of the MPS which refer to the acquisition and protection of corridor land for future rail and major transport purposes. Can you outline for the committee what acquisitions are currently under way and why these acquisitions are so important for the future needs of Queensland?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. In relation to the acquisition of land for future rail purposes, Queensland Transport has been actively pursuing opportunities for the purchase of land necessary for future schemes. One of the things that I am very passionate about as transport minister is to make decisions about corridors that can protect them before they become an issue—in fact, if necessary, acquire them before they become incredibly expensive—so that we are not making decisions today that concern us.

To date, 40 land parcels have been purchased under hardship or strategic purchase arrangements for Robina to Tugun, Caboolture to Maroochydore CAMCOS, and Gowrie to Grandchester corridor—that is the one up to Toowoomba. We are investigating four acquisitions—two for CAMCOS, one for Gowrie to Grandchester and one for Robina to Tugun under hardship or strategic arrangements depending on the outcome. We have also been working in close conjunction with Queensland Rail for the upcoming Salisbury to Kuraby scheme, and the formal acquisition of land for this scheme is expected to commence mid to late July 2005, and already we have had hardship acquisitions. To date, 12 purchases have been either settled or are under contract. Also, the commencement of the formal acquisition of land for the Robina to Reedy Creek rail extension is expected to commence later this year.

In the past when we undertook, for example, the rail corridor to the Gold Coast, for parts of it—from Robina north—it is built to take an extra track. So with the duplication that we are undertaking we do not have to go and acquire other land. On the other hand, if you have a look at some of the older alignments such as the one north of Beenleigh, where we triplicate Salisbury to Kuraby and Kuraby to Kingston, there is a necessity in those instances to undertake some land acquisitions. So we want to ensure that we take the appropriate level of corridor acquisition. That is why with Gowrie to Grandchester we wanted to get out there and identify it early. So that will be a feature of transport policy in the future.

The honourable member for Gympie would be aware of my interest further up the corridor on the north coast in securing the money under the infrastructure plan to straighten that. The terrible irony is that on the tilt train to Rockhampton it takes about an hour and a half longer to get to Bundaberg which is half the distance than it does to Rockhampton, and that is because the alignment south of approximately Nambour or Gympie is so poor. I would urge the honourable member to go for a ride in the cab of one of those locos to see how much it curves around. We want to try to fix that because it can have a significant benefit for the community.

Mr WILSON: Minister, I refer to page 1-9 of the MPS and the roll-out of the urban rail infrastructure package. The Ferny Grove line in my electorate is the busiest suburban line in Brisbane. Can you tell me what progress has been made with this program and what further initiatives are planned for rail in the south-east Queensland area?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. Not many people might know that the Ferny Grove line is the busiest passenger line in Brisbane. It certainly came as a surprise to me when I was briefed initially on QR issues. That is why under our infrastructure plan we have made a number of provisions for investment in the rail network—\$5.4 billion in 2005 dollars for track upgrades, station upgrades, extension of the network and extra Citytrain fleet over the next 20 years.

The significance of this investment in the rail network is better understood when compared with around \$1.4 billion invested in the Citytrain network and fleet in the 10 years between 1992 and 2002. Upgrades to the rail network are already being progressed by the government. The rail projects funded in 2005-06 are part of the \$900 million metropolitan track and rolling stock implementation program, and that is the first stage of the SEQIP roll-outs.

Specifically in relation to the honourable member, upgrading the Ferny Grove line is part of this program, with \$31.5 million for the Mitchelton to Keperra second track being progressed in 2005-06. This financial year we will undertake preliminary design. Community consultation will be undertaken towards the latter part of this year to early 2006 and tenders for construction by mid-2006. Major construction works will be undertaken in 2005-06, with the project completed by mid-2007. On completion of the project, that will support the introduction of two additional peak hour services to cater for the growth on the very popular rail line, providing an extra 980 seats in the morning peak.

Ferny Grove is one of the top 10 stations for patronage on the Citytrain network, with about 800,000 of the 48 million passengers on the Citytrain network each year starting their journey at this station. Queensland Transport is addressing the increased demand for commuter car parking at the station—the honourable member and I have discussed that on a number of occasions—providing more parking bays on the QR land near the station and master planning for the future in relation to that as well.

With regard to the Brisbane to Gold Coast corridor, we are spending \$184 million on the Salisbury to Kuraby third track and the Ormeau to Coomera second track to be completed by February 2008. Salisbury to Kuraby has nothing to do with, in that sense, people north of Beenleigh; it has to do with improving capacity into the Gold Coast by that third track—dual direct, bidirectionally signalled, I would imagine.

Similarly, there is \$15 million in the budget for the Ormeau to Coomera second track. There is \$123 million for the Helensvale to Robina second track and Robina to Reedy Creek track extension to be completed by August 2008. Preliminary design and consultation for the Robina to Reedy Creek extension will be requested in 2005-06 and construction by 2007. With regard to new major rail projects announced in SEQIP, there is \$300 million for the Springfield passenger line to get people to this growth section between 2006-07 and 2010-11. Might I have an extension of time?

Mr WILSON: Certainly.

Mr LUCAS: For the CAMCOS corridor there is \$1 billion worth of investment. I know that the member for Maroochydore supports it, because I have had discussions with her in relation to the CAMCOS corridor before. But what sort of region in Australia will have high-speed electric rail networks to their significant northern and southern communities? When it comes to the west, to Toowoomba, we are protecting that corridor and the Gowrie to Grandchester alignment, but that is a very expensive proposition. The most expensive part of the Melbourne to Brisbane corridor is actually getting down the range, and that is why I think in the first instance the Melbourne to Brisbane line will go to Toowoomba. But that is good in itself because Toowoomba is shaping up as a major logistic centre. The opportunity to distribute freight further around from there is, I think, extremely important.

We mentioned the Gold Coast to Reedy Creek to Elanora. There are some additional projects that I think are worth while noting. There is \$90 million for the Corinda to Darra third track, \$200 million for the Darra to Redbank third track and \$338 million for the Caboolture to Landsborough rail upgrade. If you can save 10 minutes on a journey by having trains go at a higher speed on the Caboolture to Landsborough corridor, that is 20 minutes a day. Five times a week, that is 100 minutes a week. For 48 weeks of the year that people are working, that is a lot of time that people can be either at work or with their family or doing things. So you can get enormous benefits in lifestyle and efficiency by having this additional capacity.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 1-3 of the MPS refers to the northern missing link. Could you please elaborate on your answer to government question on notice No. 6 and outline progress with this coal rail infrastructure? What is the purpose of fast-tracking the project in the absence of firm contracts from coalmining companies?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. I note his interest in the economic development of Queensland as a whole. The prefeasibility on the options to link the Goonyella area mines to Abbot Point was completed by QR in March 2005. I will supply this to honourable members because it is a little difficult to read from this distance, but in north Queensland there are two major coal systems. There is the Newlands system, which goes out of Abbot Point, and the Goonyella system, which goes out of Dalrymple Bay and also the Mitsubishi BMA port there.

The honourable member for Charters Towers, with his history of QR, will probably be aware of some of this. We have capacity constraint issues in relation to the Goonyella system and also the issue of what capacity ultimately we can get down the range in terms of servicing the ports there. Our coal industry is going gang busters at the moment, and the ability to extend further the capacity of Abbot Point and the rail network is critically important. I have to say this, though: the Abbot Point coal terminal expansion at this stage will be in two stages, with the initial expansion from the current 15 million tonnes per annum to 25 million tonnes per annum expected to be required due to increasing demand from mines in the Newlands area itself. Detailed engineering for more stockpile and onshore coal-handling equipment is under way. The second stage to 50 million tonnes per annum will depend on whether the proposed northern missing link happens.

Why is this important? Because the royalties that we get from this coal pay for our schools, our hospitals and our nurses and deliver economic benefits into these communities. The link is a 69-kilometre rail link between the Goonyella and the Newlands systems. We will have a look at whether it is appropriate to electrify it. The Goonyella system is electrified. It would not be much of an alternative if it were not electrified down through the Newlands system. The Newlands system also does not have the capacity in terms of axle loads that the Goonyella system does as well, so we will also be looking at that as well.

Normally we would say that the \$25 million for the feasibility study would be financed by the industry—and ultimately it will—but, frankly, the industry does not always speak with one voice and I am not prepared to muck around in relation to this. So we have indicated that we will do this feasibility study in relation to the northern missing link and if it proves to be feasible then there will be discussions with the industry in terms of its financing and its construction. We do not ask QR to build commercial lines that do not make a return because that would be taking money from schools, nurses and police. This is a very important project in terms of eliminating the choke point on the Goonyella system and the Connors Range and the safety of getting 10,000-tonne trains down the range. The northern missing link and Abbot Point is a key part of the planned expansion of our coalmining industry, with port capacity increasing from a current 152 million tonnes per annum to a possible 325 million tonnes per annum over the next five to six years.

CHAIR: Minister, will you table that chart?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, I am happy to do that.

Leave granted.

Mr FENLON: Minister, I refer to page 1-10 of the MPS. The prices for world coal seem to be going through the roof in recent times. Can you please describe to the committee what steps the Beattie government is taking to ensure our world-class coal port at Gladstone goes from strength to strength?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. I know his interest in this issue because I know that he is a fan of expanding capacity out of Gladstone, as am I. With limited slots coming down to Brisbane, I would rather be able to ensure that we can continue to cater for grain, which the honourable member for Maroochydore is not that interested in, and also container traffic that we need to send to the port. The solution for that is ultimately expanding our coal port even further at Gladstone and the southern missing link which we are of course very keen to work on, because most of the coal traffic these days comes up from the Surat Basin in National Party electorates. The capacity to bring that up north through Gladstone is certainly a big opportunity.

The price of metallurgical coal used in steel making has more than doubled over the past year on the back of a surge in demand from China, with China changing from an exporter of coal to an importer. These coal prices are expected to stay at these levels for the next two to three years, and Queensland is the premier supplier of this coal to the world market, with over a 50 per cent share. QR is the premier heavy haul, narrow-gauge, bulk haul rail system in the world, and I am very proud of QR in relation to that.

Our rail and port infrastructure has been progressively expanded to meet increasing demand, with rail coal in 2004-05 topping 156 million tonnes compared with only 85 million tonnes 10 years ago. The port at Gladstone has been a major contributor to this growth, with total exports through the two coal terminals at Barney Point and RG Tanna increasing by 47 per cent over the past five years to a total of approximately 43.5 million tonnes in 2004-05. We do between three and four million tonnes out of Brisbane, so that gives you a bit of an understanding of the differences.

This tonnage will increase further as the new mines at Rolleston and Minerva come on stream later this year and other mines in the region ramp up their production to meet this world demand. A major investment is currently under way at Gladstone to increase the coal terminal capacity from its current 47 million tonnes per annum to a total of 72 million tonnes per annum, and this extra capacity will progressively become available after March 2007. The total capital cost of this expansion is estimated at \$280 million, with \$191 million budgeted to be spent during 2005-06.

The expansion of the RG Tanna terminal will provide a fourth berth, a third ship loader and rail dump station, and additional stockpile areas and take it to its ultimate practical capacity of 65 million tonnes per annum. Planning has also commenced on a new coal terminal at Wiggins Island just to the north-west of RG Tanna. Indications are that a 20 million tonnes per annum first stage of this may be required within the next four years. An ultimate 60 million tonnes per annum terminal at Wiggins Island is planned if demand warrants it.

In addition to the port investment, QR has also invested heavily in additional rail capacity on the Blackwater and Moura systems and requiring additional trains to meet the burgeoning demand. The current QR committed projects on the Blackwater and Moura systems total over \$370 million with the major items being—might I have an extension, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LUCAS:—the Rolleston spur line, \$240 million, and that line is 110 kilometres—it is the largest rail extension we have had in Queensland probably in 20 years; you saw it first here in Queensland—the Wallaroo-Dingo duplication, 21 kilometres; Windah-Grantleigh duplication; the Kinrola track upgrade; and the Minerva coal project. Currently, QR is undertaking new rolling stock acquisitions, adding an extra three new trains into the Blackwater system over the next six months as new wagons or locomotives are progressively delivered.

I should say this—just remind the Commonwealth government. There has been a lot of discussion about regulation. I make the point that the government owned ports in Queensland are not regulated and the industry has not required them to be regulated, because they are very happy with their dealings with people like Leo Zussino—CQ ports and the port of Gladstone—which has done a wonderful job in negotiating with the industry and realising this significant economic benefit.

Mr O'BRIEN: I also refer to page 1-10 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. The Cairns International Airport is Australia's fifth busiest airport. Can the Minister enlighten the committee on the expansion plans for the airport over the next few years?

Mr LUCAS: I thought the honourable member might want to ask me about this because it certainly is a wonderful good-news story for far-north Queensland. On 17 September last year I, along with the Hon. Desley Boyle, Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women and member for Cairns, represented the government at the public release of the future development and expansion plans for the Cairns International Airport at a function attended by approximately 75 tourism, aviation, community and media representatives. The Cairns International Airport plays a critical role in north Queensland's regional economy with the international terminal alone creating an estimated 26,000 direct and indirect jobs.

Under the chairmanship of Clive Skarrott and his board and the CEO, Brad Geatches, the Cairns Port Authority is a top outfit. If honourable members would look at the projection of passenger figures, that is domestic, that is international and the aggregate is the top line. You can see the growth there. They have undertaken a 20-year horizon land use study, which identified the major development futures

at the airport within the time frame. Tourism Futures International, the consultants, assisted the CPA in projecting the total annual passenger movements. Both international and domestic numbers will grow from 3.9 million passengers to more than 7.9 million passengers by 2025. The study identified that planned capital improvements to the existing main runway and additional taxiways will adequately manage the projected growth in air traffic. A second main runway will not be required at least before 2025. There is other work on the runways that can be undertaken.

The board of the Cairns Port Authority has adopted the major findings and adopted a detailed \$190 million six-year development program, including international terminal building, baggage make-up and checked baggage screening, costing \$1.5 million. Might I have an extension, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: That is the time for that block of government questions.

Mr LUCAS: I might provide the details to the committee in relation to the other aspects of that if that is all right with the honourable member.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time for the first block of government questions. It is 20 minutes now for non-government questions.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Minister, will you advise what budget allocation there is for public transport, either rail or bus services, for people of the Gympie electorate needing to attend either the Noosa Hospital or other health care facilities?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. I can understand that she has significant issues in relation to this. Gympie is a rather large community but, of course, it is also near other rather large communities and sometimes facilities are shared between them. Queensland Transport does provide financial support to operate an urban bus service in Gympie with the services operating Monday to Saturday. These services provide connections to the Gympie General Hospital and the Cooloola Community Private Hospital, which provides the local community with access to the two hospitals in their township. In 2004-05 the government's support for urban services in Gympie was \$194,000.

TransLink has provided a draft TransLink network plan to improve the public transport across south-east Queensland from Noosa to Coolangatta and as far west as Helidon. The outcome of the plan is a three-year rolling program for implementation between July 2004 and July 2007. The draft network plan includes actions to make services connect by coordinating services that are fast, frequent and reliable to cater for growth and encourage people to leave their cars at home, fill gaps in the network and invest in infrastructure. It also incorporates a 10-year plan identifying longer-term priorities for improvements to services and infrastructure.

We will update that network plan annually and will access all suggestions in its review. Currently, there is a daily option to travel from Gympie to Noosa using both train and bus, but I recognise the honourable member's view that it is not a satisfactory solution, I know that you hold that view very strongly given the early departure and the late return times for the journey. Whilst there is that access, I note your view that it could be a little bit more convenient and that we are talking about people who are going to hospitals.

TransLink do look at filling gaps in the network regularly. I can advise that by July 2006 there will be a new route 632 bus service that will operate between Cooroy and Tewantin as a part of the draft TransLink network plan to ensure that hourly services operate between Noosa and Cooroy. We are also investigating new rolling stock for rail services along with accessing all other gaps in the network. Enhancements for the Gympie to Nambour and Cooroy rail service will be considered. I take the honourable member's concerns on board. I will ensure that TransLink work further with you to establish how we might accommodate that issue in the network plan.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I would like to ask some transport questions and move on to that particular area of expenditure.

Mr LUCAS: Sure.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to non-government question on notice No. 7 regarding the anticipated \$41.8 million revenue from camera detected offences during 2005-06. I note that you have finally agreed to put some of this revenue back into roads, as originally planned, but that allocation is to remain at \$17 million—the same as last year—despite the increased revenue in the reduced administrative and operational costs in Transport and Police. Why will you not increase this allocation?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. I think it is ironic that you say that we finally put it in there. I have been in the parliament all the time that you have been here. I can remember when the legislation was introduced by Vaughan Johnson as transport minister to bring in speed cameras. I can remember that we moved an amendment requiring that money to be hypothecated. It was not until Liz Cunningham indicated that she would support us in relation to that amendment that you guys were dragged kicking and screaming to allow that money to be allocated. I also note that in the time that you were there that you did not allocate any money towards black spot eradication.

When I became minister one of the issues that RACQ raised with me, and I had a concern about, was that insofar as we have the excess funds from our traffic camera program, we have allocated that towards programs such as road safety. I do not want to say for a moment that road safety is not important. I have some people here who have worked to get an outstanding result. At the moment our road safety per 100,000 people is the lowest in Australia next to the ACT. That is just outstanding in terms of our reduction in deaths. Any death or injury is a tragedy, but there has been a significant reduction in that.

What I thought was appropriate, with the Premier's strong support, was that we should make sure that the public have the maximum confidence in the speed camera program by ensuring that those surplus funds are directed towards black spot eradication. So you never did it; we did it. You never did it. The reason I wanted to do it is so that the community can see that, if they get booked, this particular black spot will be eradicated.

Let us have a talk about black spots because the Commonwealth government actually funds black spots as well. The Commonwealth government funding under the Black Spot Program at the present time is \$8.9 million per year. Of course, it returns only about 18 per cent of the fuel excise that it rips off from Australian motorists. The funding is \$8.9 million. Ours will be \$17 million in addition to existing funds. What we will do, of course, as we continue to develop is work to increase those funds even further. We do actually have some money that goes to the Blood Bank, and I make no apology for that. If you are injured in an accident often you require blood.

The other thing that we are doing at the moment is working very closely with the police and others in terms of reducing administrative costs in relation to the scheme. For example, at the present time the cameras that we use are wet film cameras. We are working towards the use of digital technology so that there can be automatic downloads and the like. Thank you for your support of our initiative that you never did.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer you to the output statement for road use management on page 1-22 of the MPS in relation to the increase in speed camera operating hours. Minister, in 2002 the Auditor-General made three specific recommendations regarding public accountability for speed camera revenue, including the development of a guidance framework, a full system of public accountability including published performance indicators on the efficiency of funded programs and an official monitoring system. Minister, have these recommendations of the Auditor-General been implemented?

Mr LUCAS: Yes. Pick up our annual report and read it.

Miss SIMPSON: Where have the performance guidelines been published?

Mr LUCAS: I am told that they are in the annual report. I am happy to get the honourable member details of it. But I might actually continue in relation to speed cameras because I think there are some important stories to tell in relation to that.

As I indicated previously, it was an amendment moved by us. I can remember it because I can remember talking to Matt Foley about it at the time in terms of the hypothecation for camera-detected offences under the Transport operations (Road Use Management) Act. We moved the amendment; not you. We had an evaluation of the speed camera program by the Monash University Accident Research Centre, otherwise known as MUARC. Based on 2003 data, speed camera programs saved 136 fatal and 2,102 hospitalisation crashes per year within two kilometres of the centre of speed camera zones from what was expected without them. That is just an outstanding initiative and that is probably one of the reasons that our death rate has reduced.

I support Vaughan Johnson's initiative for camera-detected offences. I support it; I have no problem with that. You should take some of the credit as the National-Liberal coalition for your idea and actually bringing in speed cameras and red light cameras. I support that, but you should also give us some credit for our decision to actually hypothecate it and, indeed, the decision we took this year to provide the funds for black spots, which I think is a wonderful way of demonstrating that support. Pages 95 and 96 of the annual report of the department is where that information is provided.

For 2004-05, \$17 million of the excess camera revenue to Main Roads was allocated to remove the black spots. Main Roads already directs significant funding to road safety, which is reflected through the Roads Implementation Program, and is delivered through a series of interventions, for example, construction and maintenance, Safer Roads Sooner and the Black Spot Program. The allocation provides a major boost to the existing state funded Black Spot program and the Safer Roads Sooner program, which is already worth \$130 million over five years.

When we have the projects that are red light camera or speed camera-detected offences funded, we will actually note where they are implemented. We are going to involve, of course, the RACQ, the Local Government Association, the Queensland Police Service and others in relation to the actual allocation of that money for those black spots. I think that is a very exciting initiative. The targeted road safety initiative is supported by our Road Safety strategy 2004-2011 and correlates with the National Road Safety Strategy in targeting a 40 per cent reduction in road fatalities by 2010.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer again to page 1-22 of the MPS 1-22 regarding the increased use of speed cameras and to the guidelines for the two criteria that apply to the selection of speed camera sites. The primary criteria are speed related crashes and casualty crashes based on data supplied from Queensland Transport road crash databases. Minister, of the 3,000 speed camera sites, how many were selected on the basis of the primary criteria relating to road crash data provided by your department?

Mr LUCAS: Mr Chairman, I do not actually have a list of the 3,000 sites in front of me nor the basis upon which each of them were decided. I do pride myself on attempting to have a reasonable grasp of what happens in my portfolio, but I think that might be a little bit of a big ask by the honourable member. I indicated earlier this year—

Miss SIMPSON: Can you arrange to take that on notice and ensure that it is answered?

Mr LUCAS: I am not going to provide you with a list of 3,000 sites. That is a ridiculous request.

Miss SIMPSON: Are they determined on the primary criteria of road crash database figures?

Mr LUCAS: No, I will not take it on notice; I will answer it now. One of the things that I undertook to do at the same time or around the same time—

Miss SIMPSON: Is road crash data the primary criteria that you use to determine the location?

CHAIR: Order! The minister is entitled to answer the question. Three minutes.

Mr LUCAS: One of the things I indicated that we would do, around the time that we indicated that we would bring in the black spot eradication funding—in terms of camera detected offences—was to make sure that we had maximum confidence in the method by which cameras are located. We are currently—I have made it very clear and everyone understands—reviewing the placement operation management of the cameras.

A camera program review committee has been formed which is investigating conversion to digital images capture, feasibility of new enforcement technology and management options. We are examining crash data for existing approved speed zone cameras and sites, getting extensive data sets analysed as part of this process. Factors that will be taken into account are the crash history for the last five years, engineering works within the zone and a history of speeding within the zone. We are consulting with key stakeholders, including the RACQ, the Queensland Trucking Association, CARRS-Q, Older People Speak Out, Emergency Services, Main Roads and the Local Government Association as part of the process. As part of this process, we expect to see an even more effective Speed Camera Program in the future.

Having said all of that, I make no excuse for speed cameras. They are an absolutely ultimately avoidable fine. If you do not want to pay a fine for speeding or going through a red light, here is a bit of free advice from the transport minister: don't speed or go through red lights. It is as simple as that. The statistics show that speeding and going through red lights is extremely risky to your health.

As a local member—and I am sure other members would have a similar experience—I have no shortage of people who come into my electorate office saying that they want more speed cameras at more sites, in their streets and so on. The problem is that often it is not particularly feasible to site them everywhere you want to site them. In my electorate I have people who come in, saying not that they want less speed cameras but that they want more. No-one likes paying a fine but, as I say, ultimately they are very avoidable. Particularly when you have a look at that, I think I said before that 136 people are around here. It is a pity you cannot do something like they do in advertising where they label people. You cannot have people painted blue or red, or something, who are now on this planet because of these programs. But it is a significant—significant—initiative. As I said, we are in the process of reviewing it to make sure that there is even more public confidence in it. I have no problem doing that because I think it is appropriate.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, regarding the increased use of speed cameras, I refer you to the serious fatal accidents that occurred at Federal, south of Gympie, and ask if there was an approved speed camera site at that location and when was it approved?

CHAIR: I note that we are here today to examine MPS statements. It is up to you, Minister, if you want to take the question.

Mr LUCAS: Sure. I am told that it was. I am not aware of the date that it was approved. My deputy director-general tells me that it was. I thank the honourable member for that question because—

Miss SIMPSON: Can you advise us when? Will you take that on notice?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, sure. I thank the honourable member for that question. It pays to bear in mind—and I cannot remember the exact date—that a few weeks ago, on a rainy day, notwithstanding the media coverage about that section of road at Federal, the police detected, according to their media, 210 people speeding in a four-hour period. There was some discussion the other day in the Cooloola council about it as well. People need to understand—14,000 vehicles a day use that road.

On 30 June the police issued a media statement about it. Two hundred and ten motorists were detected exceeding the speed limit. The highest speed recorded was 114 kilometres per hour. I think there was also a reference around that time to someone going 55 kilometres over the speed limit, in rain. If you speed, it is a problem. If you speed massively, it is a bigger problem. In rain, it is an even bigger problem. I really wonder sometimes if people will not get the message about speeding on our roads. Now, there are all the various message signs. We had various message signs at Federal—Slippery When Wet, and the like. They were installed by us immediately that I announced the inquiry. Notwithstanding all of those things, 210 people sped through there. Clearly, we have to do more work to get the message to people about speeding and its relationship to road safety.

Such are the vagaries of use of roads that just because you speed in a particular instance does not mean that you will be involved in an accident. However, it massively increases the capacity for it. It reduces your reaction time and it means that you are less able to control your car. The ability to place speed cameras is something that I think is important.

If you want to ask me about intelligent access programs and road fatigue, or something like that, I am happy to talk to you about that, in terms of distance over time and speed—and for trucks, as well.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Minister, I refer you to page 21 of the MPS and the prosecutions under the chain of responsibility laws. I ask: what else is the government doing to clean up the state's trucking industry and the pressures placed on many truck drivers to meet time requirements which can lead to speeding and dangerous road behaviour?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. You used to drive trucks yourself at one stage, didn't you?

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: No, no.

Mr LUCAS: I thought you drove trucks—

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: No, no.

Mr LUCAS: There's nothing wrong with that. There are plenty of women truck drivers.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: I just look like one.

Mr LUCAS: Seriously. We are actually trying to increase the number of women in the industry. Our freight task in Queensland is enormous because, unlike a lot of other states, we actually have people living in regional Queensland. People actually live in regional Queensland. It is not like Western Australia, where no-one lives outside the corner. The member for Cook, you would not get more regional than him—and he has regions within his region, almost.

I think the community are very, very concerned about the issue of cleaning up the state's trucking industry. I point out that Hughie Williams, as Secretary of the TWU, has done a fantastic job in this area. The federal industrial relations changes will circumscribe his ability to help us. It will boot out inspections, and that sort of thing, so it will circumscribe his ability to help us. The honourable member for Ferny Grove, as a former union official, would be concerned about this. It will circumscribe his ability to provide information to us to help us in our investigations.

Chain of responsibility legislation—and Queensland led Australia in relation to it—was introduced to focus on transport organisations and those associated with them, rather than individual drivers. Queensland currently leads the way in the prosecution of operators who force or allow drivers to exceed driving hours or mass and dimension requirements, and was the first state to prosecute offending operators under chain of responsibility legislation. This will be further strengthened through the implementation of the national compliance and enforcement reform package, which will enhance the compliance and enforcement capabilities by improving mechanisms for pursuing those parties. The C&E reform package will continue to be at the forefront of ensuring that anyone who is involved in the road transportation of goods—including drivers, operators, consignors, importers and exporters—will be held responsible for their actions.

The honourable member would be aware that in the past an individual truck driver has worn the breaches of the law—the time and that sort of thing. However, the fact is that your average truckie is a decent bloke or woman who does a tough job over long hours. It is a very, very competitive business. Increasingly, they have been forced by transport companies or supermarkets or manufacturers to drive unsafe and unfair hours.

We want to crack down on that for a few reasons. First of all, it is unsafe, in terms of the hours that they are driving. Might I have an extension?

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Yes.

Mr LUCAS: First of all, it is unsafe. Secondly, it is unfair. The member would have a number of transport companies in her electorate that do the right thing. Now, what happens if the bloke down the road is cutting corners and driving unfair hours? It puts them at a cost disadvantage. That is why we have the full support of Peter Garsky and the Queensland Trucking Association in relation to what we are doing.

Our legislation has indemnity provisions so that we can indemnify a driver who can provide us with information to help prosecute someone. Since the introduction of the legislation, we have issued fines of \$864,000 in total, 388 offenders for 2,090 charges, including Geoff Richards Transport, Refrigerated Transport recently, Harker Transport, and the like. That is what we have done thus far. I do not think it is good enough for us to say, well, this is what we have done so far and we will give it a big miss.

We have a further ability with the Commonwealth C&E uniform legislation that we are going to bring in. However, in addition to that, Queensland is at the forefront of a new program. Tony Kursius and I have worked very closely in relation to this. We are at the forefront of wanting to bring in what we call intelligent access programs. Often, trucking companies use GPS for fleet management purposes. Fishers use it as well and taxis use it. If that facility is available, we want to know not only where you are going but also what you are carrying—the weight and the mass. We can then operate in a far more effective way, rather than having to rely on inspections and the like. If we know at any particular point in time where a truck is then we can measure where it is going, distance over time, or, alternatively, see that maybe it is going on a certain route. A certain mass might be okay on the Bruce Highway but it might not be okay on a road at the back of Gympie. You can't just say, 'Okay, you are over a certain mass', full stop. It gives us that opportunity to further roll it out. We want to look, though, at win-win situations. Trucking companies can use GPS as a fleet management tool as well. I think that is a very important joint arrangement.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes that block of non-government questions. I call the honourable member for Ferny Grove.

Mr WILSON: Minister, I refer you to page 1-3 of the MPS, which states that \$8.7 million will be provided over four years towards transport security. Will you please detail what steps have been taken and what steps will be taken to improve both passenger security and safety on our public transport system?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. I take security issues extremely seriously. It is a standard item when I have meetings with my executive directors. Security is the first item on the agenda. We always do that in Transport meetings. Jack Noye from my department provides us with an update on what is happening. I am very proud of that initiative. We have been doing that for the best part of my time in the portfolio, which is at least six months, because I think it is an important way of reporting.

Following the terrorist attack on the Madrid rail system in March 2004, COAG endorsed the development of an intergovernmental agreement to inform the development of security arrangements for surface transport operations in Australia. The state government is responsible for surface transport security, while the Commonwealth government is primarily responsible for aviation and maritime.

Surface transport includes passenger transport by road, rail and ferry, freight transport and large tourist passenger marine vessels and supporting infrastructure. The IGA—intergovernmental agreement—outlines the agreed Commonwealth and state government roles and responsibilities, and aims to put in place arrangements to protect the community in the surface transport system by reducing the likelihood that surface transport will be a target for terrorism and other security threats, and implementing nationally consistent security planning and preventative measures.

The IGA incorporates lessons that have been learnt from overseas experience and advice from ASIO. To meet the state's responsibilities outlined in the IGA, we are undertaking a number of actions. These include reviewing legislation and introducing the required amendments, developing surface transport security policies and arrangements for services and infrastructure to ensure that they are implemented, and providing educational and training material for surface transport operators and staff. We are doing that not only in relation to government and government owned operators but also private operators. We will provide guidance and assistance to surface transport operators, audit and review operators, security plans, undertake public and staff awareness campaigns, conduct counter-terrorism and emergency management exercises, and the like.

A range of projects have been included and undertaken and commenced on surface transport security matters. This includes QR staff security training, which has been increased over recent months. QR has produced a staff training video in cooperation with DOTARS—DOTARS will release it—that will be used by other states. TransLink operators, private and government, have security clauses in their contracts. We require that in their contracts. To undertake planning and implement security measures and be involved in exercises; security self-assessments for Worklink for work books have been developed as practical systems for TransLink bus and ferry operators; accreditation standards for passenger transport operators are being changed; amendments to legislation, to be administered by QT, are proposed.

Following last Thursday's London bombings, QRS reinforced existing training and reminded staff of the need for vigilance. In a network as large as ours, it is a constant challenge—a constant challenge. The greatest number of people—might I have an extension?

Mr WILSON: Certainly.

Mr LUCAS: We had 48 million passenger journeys on QR last year. Those 48 million journeys are among the people who have a key role to play.

One of the issues that we have found—and this is an issue Australia-wide—is that whilst people have certain views as to the likelihood of terrorist attacks overseas they do not really believe that it will happen in Queensland. It is a very important message to get to people that it can happen in Australia and Queensland. The Prime Minister has made this point. But the Prime Minister has also made the point that you cannot have a metal detector—and indeed people can use non-metal explosives—at the front of each bus. We have an extensive network, so we all need to play a role in relation to saying something and seeing something. At QR, for example—and this is just one of the things that they do—all staff are required to wear a tag around their neck—and the CEO has one here on his neck; it is called *Hot or not*—about their roles in relation to those security issues. We already have the Commonwealth advertising in relation to that.

I noticed the media the other day indicating some issues with baggage left in places. I will say this: we can always do better and we need to constantly do better. Whether that is me as a member of the public—if I see something suspicious reporting it—whether it is the CEO of QR in relation to him as an employee or whether it is an employee of a bus company, we all have a role. Too often people sit back and say, 'I do not want to feel silly. I do not want to report things.' That is not the way. We would rather someone report something that they might feel might not be significant. Hopefully it is not significant but it might be, and that is why everybody has a role in relation to transport security and that is why we take it extremely seriously.

CHAIR: Page 1-19 of the MPS refers to the young drivers DVD package. Would you inform the committee about the role and content of the package and what indicators are to be used to gauge its success?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, I can. First of all, I have a free gift for all of you. I will just organise for a copy of this to be handed to each of you. My eldest son is 14. He is not too far off being in a situation where he will be starting to learn to drive. The member for Greenslopes' lovely daughter is about that age. The member for Ferny Grove's children are older, in fact. When you talk to parents—maybe the member for Ferny Grove could verify this—you find that it is one of the things they worry about on a Friday night when they are waiting for their kids to come home. They want to hear the door slam when they come in the house. It is nothing short of a tragedy that if you are aged 17 to 24 you are 2½ times more likely to die in a road accident than the rest of the community. You look after and support a child all their life to get them to the stage where they are just hitting their straps and you can lose them on the road.

One of the problems is that the way young people perceive older people is: what would they know? The fact is that we do know a lot about the implications of failing to drive sensibly, but what we wanted to do is to talk to young people in terms that they could understand, that they would relate to. That is why we came up with this *Never the same again* package, which I think is a wonderful package. I am very proud of the work that our people did in relation to this, I have to say—I really am. This goes out within about one or two weeks of someone getting their provisional licence, which is the danger period. It is not when you are on your learner's, actually. Statistically the safest place to be in a car is next to a learner driver supervising them. It is safer than driving yourself. That is an interesting statistic.

This package is about sending something to every young driver. It is a DVD that you can put into your DVD player at home—and they are very common these days. The DVD shows three young people and their families who have been irrevocably affected by youth road trauma. It is talking in their terms. It starts off filming one gentleman—a good-looking, very intelligent man—who is talking about what happened. Suddenly they pan back and you can see that he is in a wheelchair. He talks about how it has affected him as a result of doing it. Another family talks about their son, their brother, their mate who was killed in an accident—how it has changed their lives forever and what a great bloke he was. There is another family with a young gentleman who has been severely brain damaged as a result of an accident. It shows him—and I think that we might even have a picture of it in the package—coaching the Wests Arana Hills juniors I think it was, one of their Rugby League football teams. They are just wonderful families when you talk to them.

We wanted to produce something about which young people could say, 'Hang on. That is not silly old fart Paul Lucas lecturing me about how to drive on roads.' It is about them getting an understanding. Parents have a role here, too. At the same time we send the DVD we also send a booklet in an envelope for parents. It is a little message from one of the mothers, Christine Dunn, in relation to Karl, her son, who was tragically one of the young lads who died whom we have depicted in the presentation. Then it has got things for parents to talk about—discussion topics, issues about speeding, what happens and helping their other children learning to drive. Parents increasingly want to play a role.

I have to say that I want to continue to do that and there is more that we can do. We are currently working on a comprehensive discussion paper and process for young drivers about what legislation, laws and changes we can bring in to help reduce the trauma. We are also working with the Commonwealth government very closely in relation to that. They are piloting in New South Wales and Victoria—we asked to be included but John Anderson left us out—improved driver training and assessment based on the Finnish model. It is very important.

Mr WILSON: Minister, on page 1-2 of the MPS it states that \$306 million over four years has been allocated to continue the government's investment in the Inner Northern Busway. What have been the major milestones of this project and have they been completed on time and on budget?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The \$306 million over the next four years is to complete the Inner Northern Busway from Queen Street to Countess Street and to construct busway stations at Normanby, Royal Children's Hospital, King George Square and the transit centre. The first stage of the Inner Northern Busway from Countess Street to Gilchrist Avenue became operational on 23 February 2004. This stage was completed on time and within the budget of \$135 million. The next important stage is construction of the busway from Queen Street through to Roma Street and includes a busway station at King George Square Car Park. The busway station in King George Square will provide a high-quality central city bus station to complement the existing Queen Street bus station. An alliance has been formed between Queensland Transport, Leighton Contractors, Maunsell, Coffey Geosciences, Bligh Voller Nield and EDAW Gillespies for the detailed design and construction of this stage. This stage is progressing as planned with the construction to begin early next year and be completed by late 2007.

Planning has also started on the section of the busway from Roma Street to Countess Street near the transit centre. That section is planned to start construction in late 2007 and be completed by mid 2009. There is a concept drawing of that. I just wanted to say a couple of things about it. A number of options for that section of the busway are being investigated, including a dedicated busway behind the transit centre using the existing interstate rail track and relief track with a busway station incorporated into the transit centre. I would be very keen, if we can do this, to bring the buses up onto platforms 1 and 2 at Roma Street—obviously they would no longer be platforms 1 and 2—to have them inside Roma Street Station, essentially, for interchanges. Now there is integrated ticketing so you do not have to get off and get another ticket. Just the ability, with such a busy rail station as Roma Street, to actually have that interchange is just first class and something that we are very seriously wanting to investigate.

When we have this busway network rolled out there will be no other city in Australia with the level of busways that we have. Think of this: from the main northern artery under the city centre and then out on your south-east artery; then the eastern one, the Boggo Road one, for example, connecting up with the green bridge. These are about further improving how we might increase public transport. A preferred arrangement for this section is expected to be known by September or October this year. When the busway is completed between Queen Street and Countess Street, bus patrons will be able to travel to from Herston to Eight Miles Plains on a world-class busway network that provides travellers with congestion-free, fast and reliable travel.

The completion of the busway from Queen Street to Countess Street is expected to cut up to nine minutes travel time under normal conditions and up to 20 minutes travel time in heavily congested conditions. I make this point in finishing: where the busway at Woolloongabba goes on to the Captain Cook Bridge at peak time that is the passenger-carrying equivalent of 7½ lanes on the freeway. It is not a bad capacity.

Mr FENLON: Are you able to provide more details of the Buranda to Boggo Road busway, which is mentioned at page 1-39 of the MPS?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, I can. The \$170 million Boggo Road busway is proposed to be constructed through the northern portion of the PA Hospital site, the Boggo Road development site and on to the green bridge. A diagram is being displayed on the screen. I will supply a copy of that to members. You can see there we have the Princess Alexandra Hospital. The South East Freeway is there. The bus comes off there. There is an interchange station at PA Hospital. A lot of people go to and from PA Hospital, whether they are working or patients. It will go under the rail line in tunnel to a rail-bus interchange at Park Road station. Then it goes in tunnel under Boggo Road. This is only a concept at this stage. The exact route remains to be seen, but the first stage will be out along the road there. It then connects up with the Brisbane City Council green bridge off to the University of Queensland.

So stage 1, from Ipswich Road through to Annerley Road including new busway stations at the hospital and adjacent to Park Road Railway Station, is planned to start construction in early 2006 and be completed by March 2008. Stage 2, from Annerley Road to the green bridge, is planned for construction to start in 2010 and be completed by 2012. The busway will provide congestion-free, reliable and convenient travel for bus patrons from the southern and eastern suburbs of Brisbane travelling to the University of Queensland, and significant congestion in the city, of course, will be overcome as a result of it.

The 1.5 kilometre busway will require up to 1.2 kilometres of tunnel including 120 metres of tunnel under the Gold Coast rail line. The hospital has 61,000 patients each year and 4,000 staff. You can imagine, say, if you lived in Mount Gravatt and you went to the University of Queensland as a student: on the South East Busway, onto Boggo Road, onto the green bridge and, bang, you are at UQ. That is a pretty amazing benefit. You might be someone from Nundah: on the rail line, come to Dutton Park, bus to UQ. There would be various ways of getting there; that is not the only way. Or you could be going to visit someone at Princess Alexandra Hospital. These are wonderful opportunities to actually improve the transport system.

When stage 1 of the busway between Ipswich Road and Annerley Road is completed in 2008 it is planned to carry 850 buses per day, offering a bus every five minutes from the CBD to the university and a bus every 15 minutes from Carindale to the university. The busway will also link with 190 train services per day at Park Road rail station.

Mr FENLON: I refer to page 1-31 of the MPS. One of the major reasons for the introduction of integrated transport and ticketing into south-east Queensland was to make it easier to travel by public transport and to increase the number of people using public transport. Are you able to advise of recent developments, the latest usage rates and whether these increases are in line with previous expectations?

Mr LUCAS: Yes. I thank the honourable member for the question. I might just talk about the increase in usage rates. For the period July 2004 to May 2005 passenger journeys increased \$10.6 million or 9.3 per cent compared to the same period last year. Passenger journey increases have occurred in the following areas: Brisbane metro 6.9 per cent; Gold Coast 16.6 per cent; Sunshine Coast 13.7 per cent; Caboolture, Morayfield and Bribie Island 62.3 per cent; Ipswich 61.5 per cent; and Redcliffe and north Brisbane 17.9 per cent. Those increases are pretty impressive, I have to say. Average fares under TransLink have decreased since the introduction of integrated ticketing. Most bus passengers experienced a reduction in fares. Rail passengers travelling through the CBD also generally have experienced a reduction in fares. As at 31 May 2005 average fares have decreased by 16c in comparison to May 2004.

Of course, there is the TransLink network plan that you would all be aware of that we are rolling out in places, but I just want to talk about the smart card predominantly. This is just an early version of it, but it is one that works. I was out at Sandgate the other day, because we have just started our pilot now of the smart card with a very limited trial with Hornibrook buses, QR and up to a thousand people on a trial in September. I might just send a smart card to every member of parliament so you can have a bit of a trial yourself. You have to go between Sandgate, Redcliffe and Brisbane, of course, but it is a nice place to go. We will roll it out totally by the end of 2006 at this point in time. This card operates the automatic fare collection system. The pilot will test the full range of smart card technology. You can buy it at an outlet or from a vending machine, but one of the real things about it—might I have an extension or have we finished our time?

CHAIR: I think we will finish this session now.

Mr LUCAS: I will provide some further information.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The committee will now take a break and resume at 10.15.

Proceedings suspended from 10 am to 10.15 am

CHAIR: The committee will continue its examination of the portfolio for the Minister for Transport and Main Roads. Minister, you have two minutes to continue your opening statement in relation to this session.

Mr LUCAS: With the committee's concurrence I will make some specific comments about Main Roads before taking questions. With me today is my Director-General, Alan Tesch, and General Manager Corporate Services, Danielle Anderson. The Main Roads budget outcome reflects the Beattie government's continuing commitment of improving Queensland's road system. The roads program includes state funded works for state and local government roads and federal funds for the AusLink national network and black spot projects.

Since the last state budget the Beattie government has committed an extra \$1.32 billion to Queensland's roads over normal road funding sources over the next four years, including \$183 million for planning land acquisitions and initial works on the Gateway upgrade project. The state budget outcome recognises the needs of regional and rural Queensland with an extra \$448 million provided for regional roadworks outside the south-east corner over the next four years. This also includes the extra \$691 million, provided under the SEQ Infrastructure Plan and Program announced by the Premier and Treasurer in April 2005, over the same time frame. In fact, over the past 18 months the tally for the extra state government injection into Queensland's road networks stands at almost \$2.2 billion over the five-period 2004-05 to 2008-09, an overall total of \$7.4 billion in state funding for roads.

The federal government commitment to AusLink network projects in Queensland pales in comparison. Under AusLink over the same five-year period the federal government has promised a total of \$1.85 billion, which represents only 20 per cent of the total Queensland roads budget. There are a number of important initiatives such as the duplication of the Houghton Highway traffic bridge, the extension of the Centenary Highway, the upgrading of Mount Lindesay Highway, a \$42 million ringroad for Bundaberg and \$72 million to replace the Forgan and Hospital bridges in Mackay.

These allocations are in addition to existing investments of \$1.058 billion made by the Beattie government over the past 18 months, including \$186 million over three years under the Smart State Building Fund and \$301 million over four years committed during the 2004 election and \$571 million over four years from 2004-05 under the arterial roads infrastructure package. Some \$42 million has been provided for 2005-06 under the Safer Roads Sooner program, including \$17 million from camera-detected offences.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, in answer to my questions regarding the publication of performance indicators regarding speed cameras and red light cameras you referred me to pages 95 and 96 of the annual report. The tables you refer to are not the performance indicators specified by the Auditor-General, including rates of detection, timeliness of issue of notice and reduction of speed around sites. Minister, you have told the committee that the Auditor-General's recommendations have been implemented, but where are the performance indicators that meet the Auditor-General's standards?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, I am told by the department that the Auditor-General's recommendations have been met. You might want to inquire of the Auditor-General whether he is satisfied that they have been met. Secondly, I indicated to you that we would provide you with that information. I also had information provided to me in relation to the annual report. To assist I provided that to you. If you require further information, insofar as it is relevant to the question, I will provide it. That relates to Transport and we are dealing with Main Roads now.

The issue of red light cameras, given that you want to ask a Transport question, is ongoing and important. You introduced cameras in 1997. Presumably, the guidelines that you had at that time are no different from the guidelines that we have, but I would have to check that. The Auditor-General wanted further accountability in relation to them and that is something that the government is required to address and will address. I am told by Transport that we have addressed those issues. If you require further information—and one of the things you asked about was the reporting of it, which is in the annual report—on that I am happy to provide it, consistent with a sensible response.

Miss SIMPSON: I note that the minister has not put those in a published document to meet the standards of the Auditor-General.

Mr LUCAS: Ask the Auditor-General.

Miss SIMPSON: I table a copy of the minutes of a team meeting of the RS&E group of Main Roads held on Wednesday, 29 June 2005. Minister, this document refers to the SMA investigations—that is, the stone mastic asphalt investigations—and indicates that a technical expert's report into SMA has been completed and was reviewed on 30 June 2005. Will you provide a copy of this report to the committee so that the public of Queensland can be informed about the advice of the technical experts?

Mr LUCAS: Are you going to provide me with the document?

CHAIR: Minister, if you are happy to take the questions, fair enough, but I note that we are inquiring into the Ministerial Portfolio Statements and matters beyond that are not strictly under the auspices of this committee today.

Mr LUCAS: Can you draw my attention to the part of it that you are referring to? It is a lengthy document.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I have asked you whether you will provide a copy of this report to the committee so that the public of Queensland can be informed about the advice of technical experts. If you want to know where it relates to in the Ministerial Portfolio Statements, it is in the MPS at page 2-5, 'reduce injuries and death through road safety inspections and audits.' This is a matter where there have been grave concerns about the standards with Main Roads.

Mr LUCAS: I asked you to refer me to where it is mentioned in the document.

Miss SIMPSON: So are you saying you are unaware again of another issue that concerns the safety of stone mastic asphalt?

CHAIR: The minister is entitled to answer a question if he wants to.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer you to general business of the minutes at point No. 7.

Mr LUCAS: I think it is a matter of some embarrassment that your adviser just had to walk up and provide you with exactly where it is.

Miss SIMPSON: You are the minister and you do not know what is happening in your department relating to a prime safety issue.

CHAIR: The minister has three minutes to answer the question.

Mr LUCAS: I do not routinely get RS&E group management team minutes. Obviously, I think it is a source of embarrassment that you are asking a question about a document and you could not even draw my attention to the particular part of it that you are referring to. I will ask my director-general to respond to the issue.

Mr Tesch: The report that is referred to in the minutes is a draft report that was provided to the general manager of RS&E. There were a range of issues and points of clarification that he was seeking in relation to that draft report. It was only a draft report. Further work is being done on that draft report. It will be completed by the end of July.

Mr LUCAS: I am happy to make that report available when it is completed.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer again to the RS&E group meeting and to the statement by one of the senior officers—

He felt professionally compromised for almost a decade. Intelligence gained by his staff while working in the districts often evidenced a lack of compliance with departmental standards. He was unable to act on this evidence for fear of souring commercial relationships of RS&E with the districts.

Have you been made aware that professional staff have been unable to act professionally to ensure standards are being met?

Mr LUCAS: One of the things I have done in relation to stone mastic asphalt is make sure that we take action in relation to it. The simple fact of the matter is that a decision to use stone mastic asphalt was taken under the National Party government—your government. Stone mastic asphalt first came to prominence in Germany in the 1960s. Trials began in Australia in the early 1990s with its implementation in Queensland in 1996. Approximately 10 per cent of all asphalt used in Queensland is stone mastic asphalt.

I have commissioned these internationally renowned reviewers to specifically make sure that we are doing all that we ought to do in relation to stone mastic asphalt. If you have a look at the quote it indicates the difficulty RS&E staff have in dealing with the district. That is precisely the issue that we are dealing with.

For example, my director-general has indicated that we have KPMG looking into the particular instance concerning Federal. I want to make sure that we fix this issue once and for all. There has been no indication from my department about safety issues surrounding stone mastic asphalt generally other than with Federal. That is why there were public concerns addressed. That is why I not only addressed the Federal issues immediately by requiring an inquiry to be undertaken and tabled the interim report the day I got it but also I made sure that in relation to stone mastic asphalt more generally that we commissioned Professor Troutbeck and Dr Kennedy, international experts, to look throughout our network. They were commissioned with the support of the RACQ.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer again to MPS 2-5 and in particular to the road operation output regarding safety audits. I refer to your appointment of Paul Hillier to investigate the use of stone mastic asphalt. Has Mr Hillier lectured on the topic 'Tips of the trade in raising a defence to legal proceedings brought against road authorities where low skid resistance is alleged to be a contributing factor' at the International Surface Friction Conference 2005? If he did, were there any representatives of the Department of Main Roads present at that seminar?

Mr LUCAS: I am advised that there were representatives of the department at that seminar. But the fact is that as soon as the issue in relation to Mr Hillier was brought to my attention I indicated that it was important that the investigation be independent—and no-one has any concern in terms of Mr Hillier's ability or competency—and be seen to be independent. That is a critically important aspect of the issue.

He is not the person who will be dealing with it. This was raised in the *Courier-Mail* at the time. As soon as it was raised with me I indicated that we would not be proceeding with Mr Hillier's appointment and that we were looking at alternatives, and they were selected in consultation with the RACQ. If you have a look at the paper itself—and no doubt you have not looked at that because you had not looked at the other document that you gave to me—it relates to—

Miss SIMPSON: Point of order, you are misleading the committee and I ask that you withdraw it. That is offensive and untrue.

Mr LUCAS: I withdraw it. The fact that your adviser had to come and show you the page is obviously a figment of my imagination.

Miss SIMPSON: On a point of order, Mr Chairman, it has to be an unreserved withdrawal. That is offensive and true.

Mr LUCAS: I withdrew it and I made an observation as to what happened. Are you saying that that is not true?

Miss SIMPSON: Yes. You said that I had not read the document that I am presenting to you, a minister who clearly does not know what is going on in his department with regard to a prime safety issue.

CHAIR: The minister has withdrawn.

Mr LUCAS: Can I say in relation to stone mastic asphalt that the New South Wales, Victorian and Queensland road authorities collaborated in the early 1990s to bring stone mastic asphalt to Australia. The first significant trials were conducted in 1993. At about the same time, the early 1990s, stone mastic asphalt technology started to be used in the USA as a result of the US federal highways administration's technical study tours to Europe. Work done by the US states on methods of mix and extensive trials were undertaken in the US and it led to the development of a mixture that is used in Australia.

I will get some information for you in terms of the actual use of stone mastic asphalt more generally. Prior to do that I will say this to you in relation to the way the opposition has conducted itself in relation to the stone mastic asphalt issue. Recent data from Europe indicates that at least 18 countries use stone mastic asphalt. Of the top five largest users Germany is the largest, next is Spain, next is Austria, next is Sweden and next is Belgium. Germany had 34.8 million square kilometres of this road in 2004, Austria had 20 million square kilometres of this road in 2004, Sweden had 15 million square kilometres of this road in 2004 and Belgium had 7.2 square kilometres of this road in 2004. That was in 2004 alone. An enormous level of stone mastic asphalt was laid in those countries and it is laid throughout the world. What we want to do with our experts is make sure that there is absolutely the best possible outcome not only in terms of safety but also durability and we will do that.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer you again to MPS 2-5 and in particular to the road operation output regarding safety audits. I refer you to the appointment of Professor Troutbeck and Dr Chris Kennedy to carry out an investigation into the use of stone mastic asphalt, and I ask: prior to this appointment, has either of these gentlemen received remuneration from the Department of Main Roads and, if so, in what capacity and in relation to what subjects?

Mr LUCAS: I think it is highly likely—in fact, I am told that Professor Troutbeck has done work for Main Roads before. It is extremely difficult to have anyone in the roads community at a higher level of seniority who has not actually worked for a roads authority. That is not the issue, though. These appointments were undertaken in consultation with the RACQ to ensure maximum public confidence. If you want to get someone who has never acted for a road authority in Australia then you will not get someone who is an expert. So there is nothing particularly odd or peculiar about that. The RACQ was aware of Professor Troutbeck working for Main Roads as part of the appointment.

Just going back to talk about stone mastic asphalt again, in contrast to the European use of stone mastic asphalt, Queensland has placed in total 4.5 million square metres on some 400 route kilometres of road over a period of nine years. In other words, Germany lays 10 times as much SMA as Queensland has placed in total overall. I should point out that if we used the same amount used in Germany in 2004, that would be enough to surface Brisbane to Townsville, Townsville to Mt Isa and Mt Isa back to Brisbane in just one year. The Australian Asphalt Pavements Association announced on 28 June, 'Queensland motorists will be the ultimate winners, with an asphalt surfacing acknowledged to be the world's best.'

I will say this in relation to this document and this quote from Ian Reeves: it indicates that we need to ensure that internally within Main Roads, these issues are dealt with and addressed. It does not deal with an issue in terms of dealing with the senior management of Main Roads and it does not deal with an issue in terms of interfacing with the government. It does not deal with either of those. Now, what is being undertaken? We have got world-class experts who are investigating this issue so that we can ensure that all of the information is available to them. The director-general has dictated that all of the information become available to them so that they can make a proper and appropriate assessment. But I want to ensure—and my job is to fix these things—that there is appropriate communication between districts and our central engineering people. One would realise from those emails, which I tabled myself in relation to Federal, that they have not got out of the district—have not even got to the south-east region executive director, let alone the director-general or myself. That is one of the issues that we will be addressing with that KPMG issue to make sure that appropriate communication processes exist.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I table the SMA problem site matrix and note that a document refers to nine major investigations at sites. The Bruce Highway at Tanawah, the site of many major accidents, is included. It is the subject of repeated press articles—particularly, some in the *Sunshine Coast Daily*, regarding the dangers of this stretch of road. Did you ever ask for a briefing regarding these incidents?

Mr LUCAS: I have done better than that. What I have done is to commission an independent review into stone mastic asphalt generally across our network. Your government decided to bring in stone mastic asphalt. I do not have an issue with that. Now, this before me is a document that was waved around a few weeks ago by the opposition leader. I will read it to you—you probably have not read it.

Miss SIMPSON: Point of order, Mr Chairman. The minister's comments are offensive and untrue, and I ask that he withdraw them.

CHAIR: Order! There is no point of order there.

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, there is, Mr Chairman.

Mr LUCAS: I withdraw it, because I do not want to waste any more of the member's time for questions.

Miss SIMPSON: Thank you.

Mr LUCAS: But I will read what it says. Up the top it says, 'Surface mix', 'date constructed', 'company', 'plant', 'dust extraction', 'plant location'. This document is a document that was involved in the assessment of durability of stone mastic asphalt across our network to make sure that we get the maximum benefit of it. In fact the list, I am advised, contains not only roads that are owned by councils such as the Brisbane City Council, but also by Main Roads and QT in relation to those busways.

The origin of that list is that in 2002, Main Roads noticed that a section of the Bruce Highway north of Gympie was showing some signs of early wear and tear—not safety issues. The condition did not make the road unsafe, I am advised, but they commenced an investigation into what was causing this. As a result of that, they conducted a detailed investigation. You can see from the headings there that it talks about how the SMA was laid, plant location and the like to actually ascertain what was the best way to improve the durability of it. We had a number of experts out from the United States—I think it was in 2004, off the top of my head—who came and provided advice, including Larry Michael and Richard Schreck from the Virginia Asphalt Association. Indeed, the laying of that stone mastic asphalt on the Gateway was part of the conclusion of the improved durability mix in relation to that. So this is not a document that relates to safety, and you know it is not. It does not refer to any safety issue. It relates to the durability of stone mastic asphalt.

I have said it before and I will say it again. Stone mastic asphalt is used throughout Australia. It is used in Victoria and in New South Wales. It was decided to be laid by your government. I do not query that decision—but it was. It is laid extensively through Queensland and even more extensively in the United States and Europe. What we will do is to ensure that every piece of available information goes to these investigators so that we can have absolute maximum public confidence in the safety issues. I have not been provided with any suggestion from Main Roads that they were aware of any safety issue in relation to other roads surfaced with stone mastic asphalt. But I am not just taking that as given. We will provide all the information to these reviewers so that we can look at it, in relation not only to safety but to durability as well. That is a very important issue, and it is something that I am more than happy to undertake. Indeed, I undertook it. I commissioned the inquiries; I tabled the report into Federal the day that I got it. I also indicated that I support the director-general in looking at the issue of those emails that were not brought to his or my attention. We want to take this issue head on, and head on we will.

CHAIR: Does the member for Gympie have a question at this point?

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Just a short one, because we are talking about the asphalt in that area. Minister, can I ask you something about the Federal area? I refer to recent media reports about drivers speeding in the Federal area, including one driver—you previously mentioned this—who was travelling at 135 kilometres in an 80 kilometre zone. I ask: can the money the state government collects from speeding fines be put to better use in preventing speeding and accidents? It does not seem to be working, particularly in that area.

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. Immediately when I indicated that we would conduct an investigation into Federal, Main Roads lowered the speed limit in relation to that section to 80 kilometres an hour and also introduced variable message signs. The police issued a media release on 30 June 2005 indicating that in a four-hour period during rain they got 210 motorists exceeding the speed limit. We have got to understand that if you speed it is something that is highly dangerous. Those fines, which will be collected as part of our red light traffic program and the speed camera program that was introduced by the previous government, will go, after the other costs are deducted, towards the elimination of black spots. Now, this is federal highway. I will say this: the only lasting solution to the Bruce Highway south of Gympie is federal funding to do a bypass. I want to say this—

CHAIR: We will allow you some time to complete this. Would you like some more time?

Mr LUCAS: Yes, please.

CHAIR: I am sure the honourable member wants the answer.

Mr LUCAS: What Campbell Newman is prepared to do as mayor of Brisbane is to take on the federal government. I cannot find one document—one reference in the media—where either the member for Maroochydore or the Leader of the Opposition has once called on the federal government to allocate a better share and a fair share for roads in Queensland. Now, what I did during the last federal election campaign is that I positioned Queensland so that we got a commitment for Tully out of both the federal Labor Party and then, after that, the coalition—the \$80 million. So, no matter who won, we got the commitment. Not once has the member for Maroochydore got out there and given it to the federal government when it comes to what they spend on roads or rail in Queensland. That is nothing short of a disgrace, because what the big ticket item is in relation to the Bruce Highway in your area is a full bypass.

Later this year the interim routes that are potentially possible for a Gympie bypass will be out in the community for consultation, and towards the end of next year we will have a final route. That will be the acid test—the acid test will be the money to actually fix it once and for all. The interim report indicates that there is no single factor. Not only was the issue of stone mastic asphalt raised but also the camber of the road, the driving conditions and the like—all those things need to be addressed. But what motorists need to do as well is to address their driver behaviour in relation to all of our roads. Regrettably, some people do not listen to the message.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes that block of time for the first lot of non-government questions. I was going to ask you as my first question something about stone mastic as well, but I think the issue has been well and truly canvassed in that first run through. I might, instead, move to a question

about the Pacific Paradise congestion, the Sunshine Motorway and Maroochy Bridge. Traffic congestion remains an issue at Pacific Paradise. Can you update the committee on progress with works on the Sunshine Motorway to alleviate congestion?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The government has committed an extra \$384 million over the next five years to accelerate big projects on the Sunshine Coast, to address traffic congestion due to the booming population growth in this area. To specifically address the problem at Pacific Paradise, the government has committed \$145 million to widen the Sunshine Motorway to four lanes from Maroochy Road to Pacific Paradise. The works will include an additional bridge over the Maroochy River, a new interchange at Pacific Paradise and an associated connection back to David Low Way near the Sunshine Coast airport. I have got a slide that I can provide to members about that.

These works will improve traffic flow and safety on the motorway and through Pacific Paradise. Planning is being undertaken by engineering consultants and is well advanced. Main Roads, in consultation with engineering consultants, has assessed the design and delivery options to accelerate both projects. Main Roads' accelerated program will target preliminary work on the preloading of embankments on the Maroochy River Bridge approaches and the relocation of utility services commencing in late 2005, construction of the second bridge over the Maroochy River commencing mid-2006 and for completion in late 2007, and road works between Maroochy Road and Pacific Paradise, including the new interchange at Pacific Paradise and the connection to David Low Way, commencing late 2006 with completion in late 2008. To minimise traffic disruptions, widening of the existing bridge will be carried out in 2008 after the completion of the new bridge. All works are now programmed for completion by the end of 2008, subject to wet weather delays. The Department of Main Roads has committed to fast-track this project. So, it has been raised on the Sunshine Coast—the wish, as far as possible, for us to fast-track the Maroochy Bridge. The answer is that we have listened; we have done the work; it will be fast-tracked.

Mr FENLON: I believe planning and design will start soon for an upgrade of the Pacific Motorway. As this is a joint project with the Commonwealth government, what will its contribution be?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The Commonwealth government has recognised the Pacific Motorway as a link of strategic national importance and has identified it as a road of national importance which forms part of the Australian national transport network under AusLink. In doing so, the Commonwealth has clearly committed to assist the states in funding upgrades to the road and others under this banner. The state government has advised the federal government that upgrading the Pacific Motorway would exceed \$1 billion in 2005 dollars. Works will include widening the motorway to six lanes between Nerang and Stewart Road intersection; widening it to eight lanes, including two transit lanes, from the Gateway Motorway to Logan Motorway; widening it to six lanes on the Gateway Motorway north of the Pacific Motorway to Mt Gravatt-Capalaba Road; and upgrading of interchanges at Loganlea Road, Nielsen Road, Somerset Drive, Reedy Creek Road and Mudgeeraba. The Queensland government has committed \$392 million over the next five years to proceed with the necessary upgrading of the Pacific Motorway, on the condition that the Commonwealth match our commitment.

In March this year Steven Ciobo MP, the federal member for Moncrieff, wrote to me to ask what was the status of the upgrading of the Pacific Motorway. I advised him that the Queensland government has recognised the urgency of the upgrading of the road and allocated funding to proceed with the necessary work. I also sought from Mr Ciobo his cooperation in impressing on the federal government the urgent need to commit matching funding for the necessary upgrading. Unfortunately, no such commitment has come from the recent federal budget. You will recall my reply to a question on notice from the member for Southport, Peter Lawlor, in May this year regarding what benefit the Gold Coast derived from the federal budget. In my reply I stressed that although the Queensland government had already committed \$300 million, we needed a matching federal funding commitment for the Pacific Motorway upgrade in Queensland over the next eight to 10 years.

In the past, the Commonwealth government has contributed to the upgrading of the Pacific Motorway. In the late 1990s, it contributed \$150 million, indexed for the eight-laning upgrade north of Nerang. In 2003, they gave us \$120 million for Tugun. But the funding to meet the needs of the Pacific Motorway are far greater than that and they have not committed it.

What has the member for Maroochy said about that? Nothing! I do not expect her to do my job for me in relation to advocating with the federal government, but I get far more cooperation from other National Party state members of parliament on issues such as the Toowoomba second range crossing than I ever have in relation to that. It would have sent a very powerful message if the conservatives in Queensland called on the federal government to do something in relation to the Pacific Motorway. I do not think it is unreasonable for people on the Gold Coast to expect that, besides Tugun, they should get some money from the federal government for their roads. They have a whole lot of safe federal Liberal seats there. Now I am told Barnaby Joyce is going to live there. We will see what he says in relation to the need to do something with the Pacific Motorway. The problem is that my money is on the table. I have our half of the money to undertake that commitment over the next eight years. We will start with the planning and the design work but where is the federal government's commitment to it?

Mr FENLON: Minister, can you please provide and indicate the scope, cost and timeliness of the projects in the south-west transport corridor from Springfield to Yamanto?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. The recently released South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan has a strong focus on the opportunities for major development in the western corridor that includes the Swanbank, Ripley and Springfield issues. As a strategic connection identified in the IRTP, the south-west transport corridor will connect the south-west arterial road at Springfield to the Cunningham Highway at Yamanto. The corridor will service the new residential areas of Springfield and Ripley Valley, the major developments in the Swanbank industrial park—for example, the steel mill and paper mill—and the future major industrial development at Ebenezer. The road will be built prior to or concurrent with these developments. This is another example of this government's proactive approach to managing land use, infrastructure and job opportunities. Aside from providing enhanced access to the future growth areas and major developments in the Springfield-Ripley areas, the corridor will also provide an alternative link to the increasingly congested Ipswich Motorway. There is the corridor there in its broader sense.

At a community cabinet at Ipswich a few months ago we announced that we had the full money to go not only to Ripley but also all the way to the Cunningham Highway. So when it is constructed it will provide an alternative route to the Ipswich Motorway if it is congested. Again, the Ipswich Motorway is an issue that we have heard the state opposition say nothing about—nothing in defence of the people who have to use it, including people from National Party electorates who have to come into Brisbane along it. That will be a very important corridor not only for servicing that growth but also as an alternative route to the Ipswich Motorway. The other thing I have done is to make sure that in relation to acquiring the corridor we have sufficient space and room to have rail if we need it and the design is appropriate to do that, although it is rather hilly.

The state government has initially provided \$120 million as a 2004 election commitment to go to Springfield and Ripley. Due to the importance of this link, we committed an initial \$150 million as part of the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan to extend the road to Yamanto. The project involves acquisition of a corridor to allow for an ultimate four-lane road, median separated with two lanes in each direction with provision for a public transport corridor. The initial construction comprises a new 16-kilometre, two-lane road link with interchange connections at Springfield and Yamanto.

Main Roads has contributed \$13 million to Ipswich City Council to have work at the Springfield interchange incorporated into other works being undertaken by council in the Springfield town centre. Construction is currently in progress and completion of the Springfield interchange by late 2005 is anticipated. This will provide early benefits for Springfield residents while design of the new road link to the west continues. Property acquisition has commenced for the new road link and its design is currently under way. Construction is on target for commencement in early 2006-07 and to be completed towards the end of 2008-09. The ultimate construction within the corridor consists of a four-lane road with provision for public transport with interchanges at Springfield and Yamanto plus interchanges along the corridor to service the residential and industrial precincts. This is another example of us providing serious dollars to get a good infrastructure outcome.

Mr FENLON: Minister, how has local government reacted to the funding for roads and public transport in the 2005-06 budget?

Mr LUCAS: This is actually a good news story about the \$1.4 billion budgeted by the government for roads and public transport infrastructure. The local councils throughout the state are key stakeholders in Queensland's transport infrastructure. Transport is the lifeblood of their communities, and for some of the state's more remote communities distance is one of the biggest single facts of life. As a consequence, the transport sector is not only critical to day-to-day community life but also a major employer.

The Local Government Association of Queensland released its own assessment of roads and public transport funding in May this year. The LGAQ represents the interests of its constituent councils. We respect that and listen to what the LGAQ has to say. On this issue the LGAQ says that the state government has got it right. I will provide a copy of that report to the committee. It is a very interesting report because it says that the state has got it right when it comes to funding. The LGAQ says that in doubling its investment on roads and public transport since 2003-04 this government has met the state's future transport funding needs. This government has achieved the level of funding that the LGAQ's own experts say is necessary to sustain the transport services that Queensland needs. The government gets the big tick.

It is not all good news, I am sorry to say. The LGAQ does have one criticism. The LGAQ notes that federal funding for roads and public transport has gone down in real terms since 2003-04—right when Queensland's growth makes investment critical, right when the Committee for Economic Development of Australia—CEDA—tells the federal government that greater investment in infrastructure is necessary and right when the federal government tries to lever off its AusLink strategy to tell us how we should be spending our state's roads money. That is something to think about the next time you are driving down the Ipswich Motorway or driving past road gangs filling in potholes rather than constructing new works and supposedly federally funded roads right across the state.

The Gateway upgrade, with the exception of the bridge, is a federally funded highway. The federal government has committed nothing other than an initial \$18 million to that \$1.6 billion project. Again, what did the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Maroochydore say about the federal government not putting any money into the Gateway? Nothing! As I said, I would not mind if they said something on some issues, but again they say nothing.

I want to finish on this. A little while ago the *Courier-Mail* commissioned a roads report, with a number of experts talking about road funding in Queensland. It pointed out, for example, that Queensland spends about 2½ times per capita what Victoria does on its roads. It acknowledged our significant spend but said that we had to improve it even further. I am a little bit disappointed that the *Courier-Mail* had not reported on the LGAQ report, because it actually indicates in a further sense what we are continuing to do in relation to roads expenditure. I think that is extremely important in relation to giving the public the confidence that we are spending more and more and more. What we spend compared to what was spent when we came to power is significant and allows us to build more roads and the like in Queensland for the benefit of Queenslanders.

Mr WILSON: Minister, fibre composite technology is emerging as a possible source of alternative structural components for bridges. Can you please advise what action the Department of Main Roads is taking to investigate the use of this technology?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. There are currently 463 timber bridges on our state road network and over the next five years Main Roads will need to replace 1,850 girders on these bridges. The availability of hardwood timber girders for this purpose is limited, inadequate and diminishing. Main Roads has been working with the Fibre Composites Design and Development Centre at the University of Southern Queensland for eight years developing new composite materials with suitable strength, stiffness and durability for bridge structures and bridge components. In working with Wagners Composite Fibre Technologies—a very innovative Toowoomba company—the first fibre composite bridge was built and tested in 2001 and is still being monitored as it takes a load of heavy quarry trucks from Wagners quarry. A second fibre composite bridge is currently under construction by Wagners over Taromeo Creek in Blackbutt and a third is under design and testing at USQ.

In addition, USQ has developed a method of strengthening relatively weak plywood beams with composite inserts to achieve high-strength timber beams for bridge repairs. These are now in service on Main Roads bridges and several railway and highway bridges in New South Wales. Wagners installed a fibre composite bridge, built in Toowoomba, in New York State in the USA last year and has sent fibre composite bridge components to Russia. The technology to date has focused on relatively simple glass and epoxy pultrusions. Circuit generation technology may use a combination of polymer concrete and prestressing strand. Fibre composite technology in bridge decks offers benefits of lightweight portability for easier remote construction, quicker construction and longevity in harsh environments. It also has the capability to provide bridge replacement girders and reduce the demand on diminishing hardwood resources.

Toowoomba is achieving an international reputation as a centre for fibre composite innovation and heavy civil engineering projects and we want to work with them in relation to that. I will hand members an example of fibre composites compared to timber, remembering a timber girder would be solid and obviously much, much larger than this piece of timber that I have. But because fibre composite is hollow it is actually very light and, of course, environmentally friendly. I ask for that to be provided to the committee for examination.

One of the beauties of fibre composites, too, is that it is relatively simply made. I have been to Toowoomba to watch them making it. It is a bit like baking a very large cake. So it is not something that has to be high tech. The design is high tech but the actual fabrication is not necessarily that high tech. I think it is wonderful in terms of opportunities for workers at all levels in Queensland.

I think we need to be very sensible and put our money where our mouth is when it comes to fibre composites. We are doing that. Its rot resistance properties, for example, are also important. You will see more fibre composites in Queensland, not less.

Mr WILSON: Minister, can you please provide an update on the Samford Road duplication project and the estimated completion date?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for that question. It is a matter that is of interest to the honourable member, of course, as the local member. This \$16 million project provides improvements to Samford Road, including four lanes between Cobalt Street and Arbor Street, which extends the previous works between Arbor Street and Ferny Way. The main outcomes achieved by this project are to reduce peak period traffic delays on this heavily trafficked road and to improve safety at intersections. In addition, major improvements to the drainage will result in improved flood immunity and the installation of traffic signals at the Upper Kedron Road intersection will improve traffic operations for both Samford Road and local traffic.

Curing, earthworks and drainage are well advanced on the new outbound lanes and progress on the Cedar Creek Bridge widening will see deck units being placed in July. Work has also commenced on the Cedar Creek east bridge with pile driving due to be undertaken during July. In an effort to improve pedestrian safety, construction of a new concrete path along the outbound section beyond Upper Kedron Road has been brought forward and is expected to be completed by mid July. The new Upper Kedron Road intersection is taking shape with kerb and channel and pavements well advanced. Completion by Christmas has been targeted for this component of the project. The current program of work is on time and the project is scheduled for completion in July 2006, weather permitting.

CHAIR: Minister, can you please give a progress report on the work done to plan and to secure a route for the Toowoomba bypass and outline Queensland's commitment to the next phase of that project?

Mr LUCAS: I think the Toowoomba bypass is a very, very significant project and one that has real benefits for us in south-east Queensland and not just for the people on the Darling Downs and west of the Darling Downs. We have completed the Toowoomba bypass planning project, which identified a new route that passes around Toowoomba to the north and west, and we have established cost estimates for the project. The bypass will address safety and congestion issues on the existing range crossing and will address noise pollution, safety and congestion on the existing route through Toowoomba. It will be particularly attractive to heavy vehicles and will take two-thirds of the existing heavy-vehicle traffic off the existing range crossing and off the route through Toowoomba.

The accident record on the existing range crossing is four times worse than that on adjacent sections of the Warrego Highway to the east. It will also link the three national highways—the Warrego Highway to the east, the Warrego Highway to the west and the Gore Highway at the Charlton industrial area, which is destined to become a major transport hub for eastern Australia. The project is estimated to cost between \$550 million and \$650 million. The preconstruction business case and detailed planning report was submitted to the federal government in July last year. I actually had a chat to Warren Truss about it on the phone just a week or so ago.

Resumptions are nearing completion and Main Roads expects to own the proposed corridor by the end of this month. The Queensland government requested \$10 million in federal government funding in January 2005 to the completion of stage 3, the business case, and stages 4 and 5 of the public and private partnership processes. Completion of stages 3, 4 and 5 of the PPP process would enable a reliable assessment of the suitability of the project for private sector funding. It would also allow detailed assessment of the willingness of users to pay a toll and give an accurate assessment of toll levels. It would determine the potential payback to a private sector partner on identification of the necessary minimum government funding contribution. This work would be done with a \$10 million contribution from AusLink 1 in order to do the preparation necessary to determine the funding needed for implementation in AusLink 2.

I met with the Hon. John Anderson MP, former Deputy Prime Minister and federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, on 20 January to discuss a range of issues including the Toowoomba bypass. At subsequent meetings with both him and Mr Lloyd, the federal Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, I have restated our position on the Toowoomba bypass project. They keep on saying that there is not the money available to progress it at this stage. How much more do I have to do? I have spoken with a number of state members of parliament, both government and non-government—not including the member for Maroochydore, who is not interested—and they have repeatedly expressed their support for the Toowoomba range crossing to be built. I know, for example, that both the member for Toowoomba North and the member for Toowoomba South are very supportive of it. But where has been the federal commitment.

What we have indicated to them is that, even though the current five-year timing horizon for AusLink is not adequate and there is no money to build it in the current five years, we want them to bring forward the money so at least we can start the PPP and design and assessment project. Then we can bring it forward immediately in the next five years of AusLink. They have not done that; they need to fix it up.

CHAIR: We might wrap up that section of government questions and go to another block of non-government questions.

Miss SIMPSON: I refer to page 2-3 of the MPS with regard to the upgrade of the Sunshine Motorway and note that you advised the committee that the Sunshine Motorway duplication process would be brought forward, with the bridge to be completed by the end of 2008. Minister, based on the previous schedule, that brings it forward by only six months. Do you not think it is more appropriate, given the extreme gridlock on this bridge, that the project is fast-tracked with more funding allocated to bring it forward more than just six months?

Mr LUCAS: What we undertook to do was, as far as we could, bring it forward. This is a major project. You need to do preload. We will go to contracts soon for preload. What preload means is that, when you build a major road project, you have to dump an enormous quantity of dirt and other things, and you have to let the ground settle and compress for the purpose of constructing it. The bridge will

now be available by late 2007 instead of 2008-09. That is a significant bringing forward. Late 2007 instead of 2008-09—

Miss SIMPSON: It will be completed? People will be driving on the bridge and it will be completed by late 2007?

Mr LUCAS: That is what I am told: late 2007 instead of 2008-09, weather permitting. So that is a significant bringing forward.

Miss SIMPSON: Late 2007—not the financial year but the calendar year?

Mr LUCAS: The calendar year.

Miss SIMPSON: To clarify that, Minister, the capital statement makes no reference to the bridge duplication. Could you advise what the actual allocation is for the duplication works with the bridge this year?

Mr LUCAS: The capital statement is based upon the situation prior to my directing Main Roads to review it. We are actually bringing it forward, so that will need to be amended in the light of my announcement today that the project can be brought forward. That will of course be reflected in the RIP that we will publish later this year, but what we will do very shortly is go to contract for the preloading and early works in relation to it, and we would hope to commence those as soon as possible.

I will get you some amended timings, but I will give you some more general timings. We have \$35 million this year for the Sunshine Coast motorway improvements at Mooloolaba Road interchange, providing a new interchange connection to Maroochydoore boulevard commencing in mid-2006 with completion by mid-2007. It addresses Mooloolaba Road interchange for the Sugar Road connection. There is \$20 million for the four-lane motorway currently being constructed between Mooloolaba Road and Maroochydoore Road. We have discussed this before. The current timing is mid-2005, weather permitting. A few weeks ago we had significant rain in this low-lying area. There is \$110 million for the four-laning of Maroochydoore Road to Pacific Paradise, including duplication of the Maroochy River bridge. We will be fast-tracking that. There is \$35 million to construct the Pacific Paradise interchange connecting road to David Low Way commencing in late 2006, with completion by mid-2008, addressing the southbound merge at Pacific Paradise and reducing traffic through Pacific Paradise. There is \$87 million for the Maroochydoore Road four-laning from the Bruce Highway to Martins Creek, commencing mid-2006 and completing mid-2008. There is \$24 million towards the \$72.5 million Noosa demaining agreement.

Planning for future growth is also not forgotten, and we have indicated a number of those on the Sunshine Coast in relation to the motorway. So what we have done is we have listened to what people on the Sunshine Coast said at the Kawana community cabinet. I told them that we would review this issue, and we will now be more than 12 months early in relation to this project. When you listen, when you sharpen the pencils and you get out there, you can often deliver these earlier benefits. This will be a significant benefit to the community. I would ask the community to be patient in relation to the project. It is a three-lane bridge. We will need to switch traffic on to it from the two-lane bridge, which will then be widened, but it is a significant investment and improvement that will be a big benefit to your electorate and other people on the Sunshine Coast.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, now for the annual question regarding the Tugun bypass, which is fast gaining mythical status. In last year's capital statement there were allocations in 2004-05 of \$22.6 million, which, as you will remember from last year's estimates, included \$20 million that was carried over from 2003-04. Last year's documents also indicated that the total capital expenditure to 30 June 2004 was \$27.4 million. On page 98 of the capital statement the capital expenditure of the project has been reduced to \$25 million. That means that not only was none of the \$22 million allocated last year but somehow \$2.4 million has been reallocated, which I understand may have to do with writing off a portion of the expenditure incurred in New South Wales. How much of the \$56 million allocated this year is going to be spent on actually building this road?

Mr LUCAS: We will spend as much as we can as soon as we can in relation to the Tugun bypass. One of the tasks that I set myself when I came to the portfolio was delivering on the Tugun bypass. I have assiduously worked on that. It is a project that will continue to advance. It is worth while mentioning the history of the Tugun bypass. It was dead in the water on the inland route when I took over as transport minister. I went and met the community. The community down there, including the Adina Avenue residents, made their views very clear to me in no uncertain terms, and they made the point that the best route was the route west of the airport. As the Premier indicated at the community cabinet the other day, we are still getting all sorts of people who want to lodge objections to it, but I will tell you this: the vast majority of people want the Tugun bypass built.

In the middle of last year when I announced that we were back on track with the western route, when we secured support from the New South Wales government to construct it, I indicated that it would take a good 12 to 18 months for the approval processes to be undertaken and that we would not be through them until the end of this year. That still holds true. Main Roads tells me that I am getting excellent cooperation from the Commonwealth and New South Wales governments in relation to the

project, but this is a large project, it is a project for which we treat environmental issues extremely seriously, and it is a project on which we need to work very closely with the Gold Coast airport corporation because we want to build a tunnel adjacent to but ultimately under a runway on an operating airport. So it is complex in terms of its scope, but we will work assiduously in relation to it.

There are three planning processes that we are currently involved in. Shortly, the reference report in relation to the draft EIS documents will go to the New South Wales government. We have the New South Wales environmental approval processes, the Commonwealth environmental approval processes and the Commonwealth major airport development processes that we need to go through in relation to Tugun. The MDP EIS documents were placed on public display for a 90-day period from 13 December 2004 to 15 March 2005—a period three times longer than the New South Wales EPA legislation required of 30 days. The reason we did that was that the other legislation required a longer display time so we thought we might as well keep it open.

On 10 December we opened the \$19 million Stewart Road interchange. It is important to note that the bypass will reduce travel times between Stewart Road and the Tweed from 30 minutes to five minutes by 2017, save \$1.9 billion in reduced travel times and vehicle operating costs, save \$59 million in avoided accidents over 30 years and decrease carbon dioxide emissions by 3.5 per cent in 2017. We bought 76 hectares of nearby land in New South Wales for compensatory habitat. We are working very hard in relation to the project. I am very passionate about delivering on this, and we will continue to work extremely hard to do so. On Monday we announced expressions of interest—it was in the paper this morning, I think, too—for competitive alliances for the construction of the project.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the extension of the Centenary Highway from Springfield to Yamanto on page 2-2 of the MPS, and I also refer to the projection in the SEQ Regional Plan of a doubling of the population on the western corridor within the next 20 years. With the extension of the Centenary Highway out to this area, what extension of capacity is planned for the Centenary Highway given that it is virtually a parking lot at peak hour now?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question. It is good to get a good question that shows people are thinking about issues. First of all, the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan allows funding for the further widening of the Centenary Highway. I will get you the timings of that shortly. That is likely to be some variety of transit lane—not a really tough requirement transit lane but providing that additional capacity of an additional lane on the Centenary Highway.

Not only are we doing that; in relation to public transport we announced the Springfield rail corridor. The further out you get with good quality, high-speed rail links, the more efficient and effective they are as an alternative method for transporting, because the further out you get the quicker rail is comparatively to going via car. So we are very keen to encourage people as far as possible to use public transport solutions, and TransLink and its integrated ticketing are part of encouraging that as well. So we have the public transport solution in relation to it in addition to the Centenary Highway widening.

As well as that, one of the things that the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan does is encourage development in areas where people are going to be living in the future. The mistake we made in the past when we located so-called satellite suburbs around Brisbane is that we had people living there but we did not put any industry nearby. The key to it is to develop Ipswich and the greater Ipswich area as a key area where people want to work as well. I have to acknowledge the very good work that the Ipswich council has undertaken in working with the state government in looking at things such as the Ebenezer development area, Swanbank park and the like in terms of creating employment opportunities, and Springfield and its work towards higher and more advanced education facilities there. This is ensuring that we also get appropriate employment opportunities. It is multifaceted, to sum it up. We have strategies in terms of job creation. We have the Centenary Highway upgrade in addition to the Centenary to Yamanto Road. We have the public transport solution that we are undertaking.

Finally, I turn to the mayor's TransApex proposals. One of the proposals of the mayor's that I am very keen to work with him on is that which he calls the northern link, which is a tunnel solution from the Toowong roundabout linking up with the inner northern bypass. So we are very keen to work with the council in relation to a feasibility study of that, and we will continue to work with the council. At the present time we are doing the NSBT airport link with them, because I see that as also providing additional capacity in that area. I have to say that all of this is done without one red cent from your mates in the Commonwealth.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to the RSE meeting minutes which refer to an emerging electrical safety issue. What is this safety issue? It is item 2, page 1.

Mr LUCAS: Main Roads operates and owns electrical equipment including road lighting, traffic signals and intelligent transport systems installations. Electricity entities and other public bodies also own road lighting. RoadTek and other electrical contractors construct Main Roads electrical installations. Main Roads conducts a regular operational audit program related to issues of technical governance. Such an operational audit discovered some concerns relating to compliance with the Electrical Safety Act 2002 with regard to streetlighting installations in Cairns. Immediate remedial action was instigated. Organisational capabilities are being addressed to ensure that resources are available for statewide

audits. Audits of all districts will be completed by the end of 2005. Main Roads is committed to providing a safe work environment for its staff and contractors and to ensure the safety of the travelling public. We want to ensure that we are meeting our obligations, and that is why we are undertaking this further work.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer again to the RSE group minutes and to a statement at page 2 by another senior officer who said that timber bridges were being replaced which did not have the risk scores warranting replacement whilst a significant number of bridges in the region which meet the risk criteria have not been replaced. Minister, why is your department not replacing bridges that have a high risk level?

Mr LUCAS: I have made it very clear to my department that I expect them to make the appropriate risk-based decisions on all things that they undertake. What we have done is significantly increase our funding when it comes to bridge repairs. For example, in 2003-04, \$18.2 million was spent on bridge repairs, and an accelerated bridge replacement program was initiated in the southern region. This project will replace 31 timber bridges with modern bridges over the next five years at an estimated cost of \$48 million. An ARRP program in central Queensland will see 71 kilometres of the Dawson Highway rehabilitated and five timber bridges replaced over two years at a cost of \$40 million. So there is \$88 million in further funds in central and southern Queensland regions being expended to improve the quality of our road network.

As I said to you, we have a number of timber bridges, and ultimately timber bridges need replacement, unlike concrete or fibre composite bridges which last very, very long periods of time. What I expect my department to do is appropriately apportion and advise me—I am not an engineer—on the priorities for bridges, but sometimes bridges need to be replaced for higher mass limit issues or traffic issues. The fact is, though, that I would hope in the future that, notwithstanding our significant increase and improvement in money that we are spending in replacing bridges, we can do even more in relation to that.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer to MPS 2-20 in relation to the operation of Transmax Pty Ltd, which is owned by the state of Queensland through the Department of Main Roads, and I ask: what funding is provided to this company? Where is this funding provided for in the MPS document?

Mr LUCAS: I will take that on notice.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I note that provision is made in TIDS capital grants on capital statement 99 for the Kelliher Road—Garden Road underpass, and I note that most of the funding for this project is for the years beyond this budget. Given that the current queuing of traffic back from this intersection is a major reason for delays on the Ipswich Motorway—Centenary Highway, when is this project going to be completed?

Mr LUCAS: I will get Bob Drew, district director of south-east Queensland, to provide some detail in relation to that.

I might provide these as preliminary comments. Garden and Kelliher roads form a continuous north-south BCC controlled link between the northern end of the Centenary Highway extension to Springfield and the Centenary Highway—Ipswich Motorway interchange. Boundary Road is also a BCC road that crosses Kelliher Road. The section of road is heavily congested during peak hours and traffic often backs up through Centenary Highway roundabout to Sumners Road. This impacts on the performance of the Centenary Highway—Ipswich Motorway interchange.

The council entered into an alliance early on in 2001, and in 2002 its planning project was put on hold until the planning for the Ipswich Motorway six-lane upgrade was completed. It reactivated the project in 2003. We have been working jointly with the Brisbane City Council, and it has invited us to join the alliance board as obviously we wanted to work with them in relation to this, and ultimately we will do so. The contribution is about two-thirds Main Roads and one-third Brisbane City Council. They are estimates according to the Brisbane City Council.

The Darra to Springfield railway line will be commenced in the short term. That will also have a significant impact on the scope of the works required for this project. The good news is that we are going to undertake the project. I will get Bob Drew to provide some more information in relation to that.

Mr Drew: I am not sure what additional information I could provide you. I think the Minister has covered it fairly well.

Miss SIMPSON: Can I ask a further question of the Minister then perhaps? Minister, given the current restrictions of existing infrastructure—and this is a question with regard to the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan and Program through to 2006—there is a proposal for a bus priority transit lane on the Centenary Highway to be delivered some time after 2009 between the Ipswich Motorway and Toowong. Could you please advise if there are going to be additional lanes or will this use the existing carriageway?

Mr LUCAS: Oh, no, an additional lane. It is two lanes either way at the present time and there will be a third lane. I might take the opportunity to talk about it in a network sense.

CHAIR: You still have two and a half minutes on this. That is the end of the opposition block of questions at this time.

Mr LUCAS: Okay. As I have indicated before, we would hope that there would be an extra lane in relation to either side. It is about improving that capacity. You raised that issue with me. I think that is a fair enough point, and that is why we are addressing it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Mr WILSON: Minister, can you outline the objectives of the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation? Has Main Roads identified a route for a western bypass?

Mr LUCAS: I thank the honourable member for the question because the honourable member has significant issues with this. I acknowledge his strong interest in the area to ensure that the best interests of his community are protected.

The objectives of the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation will be to work with the community to identify deficiencies and possible solutions for transport networks in the western area, develop transport strategies that meet the community's needs and reinforce the government's commitment to supporting growth in the western corridor of Brisbane, confirm if any new transport corridors are needed for either passengers or freight and, if so, their route location.

The issue of a western bypass will be considered as an integral part of that transport network investigation. No investigations of routes will be undertaken until this broader study confirms the need, role and function of any new corridors, including a possible bypass. One of the things is that with these projects that I announced and discussed earlier—when we talk about the improvement to the Centenary Highway and the potential northern link, and the upgrade of the western motorway—you just do not build the western bypass to prove a point. You actually build if there is a need to build it, and where it needs to be built is subject to a very detailed study.

In the *Courier-Mail* on 26 April 2004 Senator Ian Campbell, then roads minister, was quoted as saying—

Federal Roads Minister, Ian Campbell, will ask the state government this week to consider planning a major highway link to Ipswich with Caboolture. Senator Campbell said it was vital roads were up to scratch with massive population growth expected in the south-east corner over the next two decades. There is no doubt about it; it is going to cost a lot of money, but the federal government is prepared to put a lot of money in.

That sentiment was confirmed in the *Courier-Mail* article of 29 May. The issue of joint funding for a study known as the Western Brisbane Transport Network Investigation was discussed in a meeting between myself and Mr Lloyd on 9 November 2004, at which I indicated that Queensland was contributing \$5 million towards the study and sought matching Commonwealth funding. My letter to the federal government of 24 January 2005 confirmed the request. Minister Lloyd's letter of 28 February declined Commonwealth funding and says—

At present a future western bypass of Brisbane is some years ago away and there are major infrastructure tasks that already lie ahead of the announced AusLink network.

In December 2004 Main Roads forwarded a stage 2 submission seeking \$5 million matching funding, and we have received no response to that submission by the federal government. My recollection is that the other day there was an article in the *Courier-Mail* where Jim Lloyd now says that we should do something about the western bypass. Can I have an extension, please?

Mr WILSON: Certainly.

Mr LUCAS: What we want to do is take the politics and the silliness out of this. It is funny that we can seem to work with a Liberal lord mayor in relation to road projects but we cannot seem to get cooperation from the federal government. We are not asking it to fund a western bypass at this point in time. What we want it to do is join us at the table and for both of us to give \$5 million each to do what will take quite a number of years of study so that the community can have its say. The community can see whether we actually need a bypass or not and, if so, where it goes. That is appropriate planning.

In one moment the federal government says, 'Oh, look, we haven't done enough in the past with planning in south-east Queensland et cetera.' The next moment it will not come up with a lousy \$5 million to take its place at the table. We really do need it to do that. I note that the opposition leader has said that he believes we need a western bypass, so we have something there. It is really important for the future of south-east Queensland that we undertake the study. But, as I said to you, there are no lines on maps because we need to undertake the study.

CHAIR: Minister, I wanted to ask you a question in relation to the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Gympie, which I drive about 30 or 40 times a year and which, of course, anyone coming from Hervey Bay to Brisbane also drives. Minister, it has a bad accident record. Can you tell the committee what the state and federal governments are doing to improve this section of the highway?

Mr LUCAS: Absolutely. As stated in my responses earlier, and as you know, on 12 May I announced that an investigation would be conducted into the condition of the Bruce Highway at Federal—that is, its pavement et cetera—following the tragic double fatality that occurred on Wednesday 11 May. On 15 May, Main Roads lowered the speed limit to 80 kilometres per hour at Federal and introduced variable message signs warning motorists to drive to the conditions. I personally inspected it myself around that time.

On 21 June I held a press conference to announce the preliminary findings of this report. I expect the final report to be handed to me by 1 July. The first conclusion of the preliminary finding states that the investigations conducted do not show any one factor being responsible for causing crashes along this section of the Bruce Highway. As reported in recent media articles, it is most unfortunate that motorists are disregarding speed limits and weather conditions when driving on the Bruce Highway at Federal. Media reports indicate that within a four-hour period as many as 210 motorists have been detected exceeding the speed limit in this area.

Nevertheless, I am committed to making any changes possible to improve the safety of this section of the highway and therefore have considered the preliminary findings. I have instructed Main Roads engineers to prepare designs immediately to replace the existing asphalt with an open-graded asphalt. The department moved to immediately prepare designs to replace the existing stone mastic surface. I am now pleased to announce that, subject to weather and industry availability, we should be able to complete the resurfacing by November or early December. I know that the member for Gympie has raised the issue in terms of trying to do it earlier.

While the preliminary findings make no adverse comments about stone mastic asphalt as a product in general, on 23 June 2005 I announced an independent review on the use of SMA by Main Roads on the state controlled road network throughout Queensland. This review will be undertaken by Professor Rod Troutbeck and Dr Chris Kennedy. The investigation will consider the use of SMA at all locations of the Queensland state controlled road network using pre- and post- SMA crash history and other pertinent factors.

As the Bruce Highway is a Commonwealth funded National Highway, I am writing to the Hon. Jim Lloyd, federal Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, to confirm the necessary funding to resurface it. He has actually confirmed that with me; there is no problem with that. The Commonwealth government has committed \$4.3 million for the planning study of the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Curra. The study is to examine how best to improve the safety, reduce delays and improve freight efficiency over the next 30 years. The study includes full public engagement and options for public comments, which will be displayed over this year. Main Roads is currently looking at ways to fast track the planning study.

I further instructed Main Roads to conduct an investigation of the remaining section of the Bruce Highway between Cooroy and Gympie to find to what opportunities there are for improvements to road safety in this area. I hope to have the results of this investigation by the end of August. The upgrade of the Bruce Highway to Curra is a real solution to the unacceptable crash history north of Yandina to Gympie. I am working with my Commonwealth colleagues to ensure that funding will be available once the planning study has identified the best option.

As I said before, there are two long-term issues. Might I have an extension?

CHAIR: By all means, Minister.

Mr LUCAS: One is in relation to a better and new alignment. That road is flood prone and it snakes from Cooroy to Gympie. It needs to have a new alignment. I suppose the acid test—and I have made this point repeatedly—will be when we get the study to ensure Commonwealth funding for this important part of the National Highway. I do not wish to be churlish about this; we have been given a number of funding grants, including some four-laning through Gympie, that I think we are very shortly going out on for community consultation. There are some works at Black Mountain, which also has a poor history, which I am told is not stone mastic asphalt. I note that one of the local councillors referred to it in the context of it as stone mastic asphalt. It is open-graded asphalt. The whole section of the Bruce Highway from Gympie to Curra needs to be replaced essentially with a bypass. That is the long-term issue.

The other long-term issue is people's driving habits on that road, particularly as use increases. As I said, in the *Gympie Times* this week Councillor Ron Owen is talking about Black Mountain. Black Mountain is not stone mastic asphalt; it is open grade asphalt. There was an article or some media coverage about an injury—and the lawyers were talking about it—on Montville-Mapleton Road. There was a single vehicle accident at the intersection of Maple Avenue and Montville-Mapleton Road. The lawyers were out there talking about it. Well, it did not occur on stone mastic asphalt, either. A lot of misinformation and misconceptions are happening about this.

However, it is very important that we address the issues, and address the issues we will. I make it absolutely crystal clear that I expect Main Roads to make sure that we have the best possible road surfaces, bearing in mind the nature of the road, its use and the conditions. Frankly, if they can use it throughout Germany in very icy and rainy conditions we can use it in Queensland. However, we want that independent report to give the public absolute confidence.

Mr FENLON: Minister, can you inform the committee when the decision will be made on the future of the Ipswich Motorway?

Mr LUCAS: It has been reported in the media that the Prime Minister will be visiting Brisbane before the next sitting of federal parliament on 9 August. It may be that on that visit he will make an announcement on the future of the Ipswich Motorway. We have cooperated fully with all studies into the

motorway. It is now time for the federal government to make a decision to fund the full upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway. Canberra is in possession of all the facts. They clearly show that the state government's preferred option for a full upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway is the only way to proceed.

This is what happens when the federal government lets Cameron Thompson take over road transport ministry responsibilities. He mucks it up. In 2000, the department of main roads commenced a major planning study for upgrading of the Ipswich Motorway. This is a federally funded National Highway connecting Ipswich, the Cunningham Highway and the Warrego Highway to Brisbane and the port of Brisbane.

The planning study recommended a major six-lane upgrade of the Ipswich Motorway, with additional lanes for lane balancing and adjacent service roads to improve traffic safety, freight efficiency and overall traffic flow. It may potentially provide for up to 10 additional lanes of traffic—including service roads and the like—and cater for peak hour traffic for the next 20 years.

The federal government made it conditional—it was its condition—that an Ipswich Motorway alternative northern corridor be investigated prior to any long-term options being adopted for the Ipswich Motorway. This proposed alternative extends only to the western section of the Ipswich Motorway. The federal government allocated \$2.1 million for this task.

Maunsells, as independent people, was commissioned to complete a feasibility investigation to identify any potentially feasible routes. Its report outlines three feasible routes within the context of the study. Costs of the feasible options range from \$820 million to \$1.1 billion, excluding \$160 million for the Logan Motorway interchange which it has already allocated. That project is proceeding. The report identified 2012 as the likely date for construction to be completed. The first benefit from the half northern bypass, which would be for only half the corridor anyway, is in 2012—seven years away. That is just ridiculous. We asked Maunsells to look at the Ipswich Motorway option, because they were the same independent people. They looked at a full upgrade. The comparison? It would be the same cost of \$1.1 billion, including \$160 million for the interchange, which is already put in, and it would be completed in a 4½-year time-frame.

Our preferred option offers integrated transport solutions for all major transport, pedestrians, cyclists, access to public transport and service roads over 19 kilometres instead of eight kilometres. The Liberal Party at a state level—through Bruce Flegg—is on the record as supporting it. The RACQ supports it. The Brisbane City Council Mayor, a Liberal, supports it. The state Labor government supports it. The federal opposition supports it. The Ipswich council supports it. I am not sure what the member for Maroochydore's views are. What are your views on it? Not answering? We do not know. We do not know what the National Party's view is in relation to it. Might I have an extension?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr LUCAS: We do not know what the National Party's view is in relation to it. It does not often say things about the federal government. However, everybody, except the federal government—

Miss SIMPSON: That would require an extension of time.

Mr LUCAS: Well, yes or no? Are you in favour of it or are you not in favour of it?

Miss SIMPSON: You have started to ask me questions. If you want to extend the time of estimates, that is another matter.

Mr LUCAS: All right. You can say it on the record outside.

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Everyone agrees with the importance of the Ipswich Motorway upgrade. The federal government is the odd one out. I do not want to point the finger; I just want to build it. One of the beauties of our proposal is that it offers the opportunity for staging and for early openings. That is of critical importance. Rather than wait until 2012 for the lot, we can open along the way. Substantially less of the Ipswich Motorway project, unlike the Pacific Motorway, is actually on pre-existing corridors. You do not have the situation of traffic snaking in and out as much. I think it is under 10 per cent, off the top of my head. It actually makes that project fairly expeditious.

That is what we want to do. We need a commitment from the federal government so that we can get on with the job. We are doing our job in that part of the world. We are not asking it for money for our projects. I am not talking about Centenary Highway extensions or widening or Ripley rail extensions. I am not asking it for money for that; that is our job. We should stick to our job and finance that. Why won't the federal government stick to its job and finance this?

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, can you please provide an update on the Townsville port access road and associated funding arrangements for that road?

Mr LUCAS: Yes. I noticed the National Party at prayer at Commerce Queensland the other day, when the media announced the importance of lobbying the federal and state governments in relation to the Townsville port access road. I am happy to talk to them about it. However, I think that they should lobby the federal government when it comes to the Townsville port access road.

Main Roads, on behalf of the government, is carrying out planning for the Townsville port access road project to link the Flinders and Bruce highways to the port of Townsville. This 10-kilometre project consists of two stages. Stage 1, the Stuart bypass, is 2½ kilometres which will link the Flinders Highway to the Bruce Highway. Stage 2, the eastern access corridor, is 7½ kilometres which will link the Bruce Highway to the port.

The current preliminary estimate for stages 1 and 2 of \$115.2 million in out-turned dollars is based on full completion in 2008-09. The project requires joint funding of \$57.5 million from the state and federal governments. The cost will increase to allow for inflation the longer it is delayed. The state budget includes \$4.8 million in 2005-06 to progress the Townsville port access project, which is \$3.5 million for stage 1 and \$1.3 million for stage 2.

The funding allows for planning and land acquisition to be completed for the project's stage 1, the Stuart bypass, by the end of 2005. The 2005-06 allocation is part of a total of \$10.5 million in state funding that has so far been committed over four years, commencing 2003-04, to progress planning. It includes \$8 million for the Stuart bypass under the Smart State Building Fund initiative.

The current allocation also allows for planning, land acquisition and work to seek federal environmental approval for stage 2, the eastern access corridor, to be completed by June 2006. A comprehensive environmental impact assessment was completed in 2000 on the eastern corridor. However, as it will trigger the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act, additional environmental work must be done.

The state government has requested joint federal funding on several occasions, most recently in discussions with the now former Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, and federal roads minister Jim Lloyd at the ATC meeting in June at Alice Springs. Previous requests include December 2003, August 2004, November 2004 and January 2005.

The current indication is that the federal government does not wish to consider funding until 2009-10 at the earliest on AusLink 2. This was conveyed in a letter dated 25 February 2005 from the federal roads minister, Jim Lloyd. However, I am hoping that once this initial work has been completed it will reconsider and join with the state government to deliver stage 1 and to make a start on stage 2, in line with the state's request.

The state government has commissioned an economic assessment of the Townsville port access road to better quantify the flow-on economic benefits that it is likely to stimulate in order to further strengthen the case for federal funding. I have had some good meetings with Peter Lindsay about it and I am committed to working with the federal government in relation to this. However, it needs to recognise the importance of this project. I am not one of those people who does not believe in talking to federal government members in relation to the importance of our project or, indeed, talking to state opposition members. There is an opportunity for us to deliver on this, but the federal government needs to come to the party.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, can you please outline progress in delivering the Bruce Highway upgrade south of Tully?

Mr LUCAS: Absolutely. Work on the first phase of the upgrade, a complex planning study, is progressing very well. It will be completed by June 2006, as agreed with the federal government and as I announced in a joint media release with the federal minister in December 2004. The project's time lines were adjusted, by mutual agreement, from those originally accompanying the federal announcement of funding in December 2004 to provide an achievable and realistic project delivery timeframe.

The planning study is needed to get more detailed information about how the complex Tully-Murray rivers flood plain functions and to work with the community to find a way to upgrade a 15-kilometre section of the highway south of Tully to significantly reduce highway flooding closures without moving the flooding to another area. The major flood plain has a wide catchment in very high rainfall areas. Tully has the highest rainfall in the state, with annual totals of between three and four metres.

Detailed information is needed to understand the complexity of water flow patterns on the flood plain and how the highway, the nearby north coast railway line and nearby agricultural land interact with or affect each other during flooding. You cannot build a massive, \$80 million undertaking and just put it anywhere. You might cause enormous local flooding or create artificial dams and the like. It could be a major issue.

The study includes a very careful investigation of how drainage patterns on nearby land affect flooding impacts on the highway and how raising the highway could change flooding patterns on nearby land. This is vital so that potential impacts can be well understood and the highway upgrade can be planned to manage these impacts.

As well as studies of flood patterns and drainage, other investigations will include survey work, traffic studies and environmental and cultural heritage investigations. A sensitively managed consultation process with the community, particularly nearby land-holders, is a crucial part of the process and one that needs an appropriate investment of time.

In December 2004, the engineering consultants Maunsells were engaged by Main Roads to carry out technical investigations. As community consultation is a very important part of the study, Main Roads has also engaged specialist consultation consultants, environment and behaviour consultants.

CHAIR: Minister, you still have another minute on this and then we will have time for one more question from non-government members.

Mr LUCAS: I will just conclude this. We have been faced with closures of up to two days on this section of road.

Mr O'Brien interjected.

Mr LUCAS: Longer than that, the member for Cook has said. As there are other major flood plains for the Bruce Highway between Cairns and Maryborough, the target for improving flood immunity was set at a maximum closure of 48 hours. It has actually been worse, as the member for Cook points out. It has closed for two weeks during severe wet seasons for the Bruce Highway south of Tully. Four thousand vehicles a day go on it. This has a major adverse impact on commerce. As I indicated before, at the federal election campaign I wanted a commitment that no matter who won we would know that Queensland motorists would get Tully fixed. We have that commitment now. That is part of being a roads minister—being prepared to put pressure on your own people as much as other people.

CHAIR: That concludes that block of government questions. The opposition has four minutes left.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, I refer you to page 2-32, Administered Items. The section titled 'Description' indicates that last year the Australian government provided \$194 million and this year is providing \$206 million, which it goes on to refer to as a decrease in funding. Now, I know that you cannot help yourself kicking Canberra at every opportunity, but if I gave you 194 apples last year and this year I gave you 206 apples, does that not mean that you have an increase of 12 apples and not a reduction at all?

Mr LUCAS: No. I will just ask Karen Peut, who is the guru of federal roads funding, to put that in context for you.

Miss SIMPSON: So your report is wrong?

Mr LUCAS: No. I am asking Karen Peut to provide you with the detailed information, but that is very clearly not the case.

Mrs Peut: I think the answer is that it is tied up with carryover funding, but I would need to check, Minister.

Mr LUCAS: You need only look at what the federal government has done when it comes to our population increase. The simple fact of the matter is that it has not provided what it ought to in relation to our road system in Queensland. Where is the evidence of what you said about the Gateway? There was no money provided for that. Where is the evidence of what you said about the Ipswich Motorway? There was no money provided for that. What did you say about the Pacific Motorway? There was no money provided for that.

We have enormously improved our level of funding. It is massively higher than what was provided under your successive budgets. Also in relation to that, we again provided even more money under the South East Queensland Infrastructure Plan. Our money is supplied one as to five, generally. The federal proportion is about 20 per cent to our 80 per cent when it comes to road funding. It simply does not meet its requirement. It gives back through road funding 18 per cent of what it collects in fuel excise.

The Commonwealth government, time and time again, does not provide an appropriate level of funding. If you think that you are not the only person in Queensland who thinks that we are getting a fair deal out of the federal government on road funding, then you are on a different planet to me and everyone else. It is clearly the case that its contribution to roads is not good enough, and everybody understands that. Putting aside the \$80 million that I managed to negotiate out of it for Tully during the federal election campaign, AusLink, for the entire 1,650 kilometres—

Miss SIMPSON: Keep tap dancing, Minister. We still do not have an answer to the question.

Mr LUCAS: For the entire 1,650 kilometres of the Bruce Highway north of Caboolture, under the five years of AusLink \$210 million was allocated. Do you think that is justifiable? In the first year of AusLink, the federal government allocation for the Bruce Highway under AusLink was \$10 million and the year after it was \$5 million. That is for 1,650 kilometres. Do you think that is successful?

The problem is that you actually have not said anything about it. You have said nothing about it. I think that is the ultimate and absolute disgrace and indictment. If you are on the same side as them, what you say can be like absolute lightning in drawing attention to the lack of funding. You were more than happy to ask the state government for more in relation to roads on the Sunshine Coast, and we listened and we did it. However, you are always struck dumb when it comes to the federal government and its need to provide income for us.

Miss SIMPSON: Minister, for a tap dancer you do not dance very well. You did you not answer that question.

CHAIR: Thank you. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of expenditure in the portfolio of Transport and Main Roads has expired. On behalf of the committee, I thank you, Minister, and your departmental officers for your attendance. The transcript of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of parliament's web site within the amazingly short period of two hours. The hearing is now suspended for a short break. The hearing will resume at 11.50 am with the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors.

Mr LUCAS: I thank the committee chair, members and staff, and I thank my departmental staff as well.

Proceedings suspended from 11.45 am to 11.54 am

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—COMMUNITIES, DISABILITY SERVICES AND SENIORS

In Attendance

Hon. FW Pitt, Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors

Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors

Ms L Apelt, Director-General

Ms L O'Neill, Director, Finance and Administration

Ms B Kill, Assistant Director-General, Office of Programs, Policy and Community and Specialist Services

Mr R Sutherland, Assistant Director-General, Office of Corporate and Executive Services and Accommodation Support and Respite Services

CHAIR: The hearings of Estimates Committee F are resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. 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 single chime will give a 15-second warning and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given.

The sessional orders require that at least half of the time available for questions and answers is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time expended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members. I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question if the minister refers a question to them so that Hansard can record their name. I ask also that mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I now declare the expenditures for the Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors be open to examination. The time allocated is three hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, do you wish to make an opening statement?

Mr PITT: Yes, I do, Mr Chairman. Thank you, Mr Chairman and members of the committee, for this opportunity to appear before you here today and to address you. The estimates process a very important part of our democracy. It gives members and the public the chance to learn more about the detail of the workings of both of my departments.

I am glad to have this opportunity to field your questions because I think we have some great stories to tell. Last year I said at the start of the estimates hearing that I had a great deal of pride in the budget for Disability Services Queensland, which included a massive \$220 million increase in funding over four years. I think I am at risk of succumbing to one of the seven deadly sins—pride—because I can only say again how proud I am of this government's commitment to increasing spending on services for people with a disability.

The budget for Disability Services Queensland and the budget for the Department of Communities show that the Beattie government is a government with heart. They show that Labor governments can be great economic managers and deliver on our core principles: caring for the community's most vulnerable.

This year's budget represents another record for DSQ and includes an extra \$180 million over four years. That is on top of the very significant increases in spending over the past few years under this government. Funding for this financial year has been boosted by a very significant \$68.5 million over last year's allocation. The budget for Disability Services Queensland contains many good initiatives and increases in spending on important programs that will make a real difference to the lives of people with a disability, their families and carers. I hope to be able to expand on those today.

One of the new initiatives I am particularly pleased about may not be the biggest ticket item in terms of funding but will make a big impact—that is, a \$6 million allocation over four years for a program aimed at assisting people with a spinal injury to return to community life from acute care. Last year I met with a number of people who had sustained spinal injuries and heard first-hand of their experiences. I felt very strongly that we could do better in terms of the assistance that we provide. This funding will help me deliver on a personal commitment to people with spinal injuries.

The budget for the Department of Communities also contains many important initiatives—too many to discuss in five minutes—but I am sure you will be keen to hear more about those today. A total of \$358.7 million has been allocated to the department, which reflects the depth of the government's commitment to building strong communities and improving the quality of life for all Queenslanders wherever they live. One of the highlights of the Department of Communities is the allocation of \$24.3 million over the next four years, including \$9.3 million this financial year for a major new initiative aimed at improving service delivery to Queenslanders.

The Strengthening NGOs project aims to find better ways to provide practical support for organisations which deliver services funded by the department and by Disability Services Queensland. As members would know, non-government organisations deliver a truly vast range of vital services and support to families and individuals and are the backbone of many of our communities. The government provides a very significant amount of funding to NGOs to provide those services. This project is about helping NGOs gain strength and capacity and ultimately provide more and better service to Queenslanders.

I want to acknowledge the bipartisan support I have received over the past year and, in particular, to acknowledge the support of my shadow spokespeople. I believe this approach will help us obtain the best possible results for the most vulnerable people in our communities. Once again, can I say I am very pleased to be given this opportunity to appear before you and I am happy to answer any questions you may have. But before I do, Mr Chairman, with your permission I would like to ask my director-general to clarify one issue in the MPS relating to full-time equivalent staff, with your permission.

Ms Apelt: I draw the committee's attention to the staffing table on page 2-7 of the DSQ 2005-06 MPS. The breakdown of the total staff across the department's three outputs requires amendment. I take the opportunity to correct the record and ask to table the amended figures with the committee. I point out that the totals are unchanged. The error occurred in the distribution of full-time estimates across the funded outputs. The table should read that the 'Support for Adults' output in 2004-05 estimated actual is 1,094 and the 2005-06 estimate is 1,129; 'Support for Children and Families' for 2004-05 estimated actual is 876 and for 2005-06 the estimate is 905.

Leave granted.

Ms Apelt: 'Community and Infrastructure Support' estimated actual for 2004-05 is 137 and the estimate for 2005-06 is 141.

CHAIR: The first period of questioning will be from non-government members. I call the honourable member for Gympie.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: In response to the many people on the waiting list to receive an Adult Lifestyle Support package, are there any plans to review the viability of an alternative to these types of packages in the long term so that a system can be put in place so that so many people will not be left behind in the future?

Mr PITT: Thank you for the question. In 2004-05 Disability Services Queensland allocated an additional \$10.7 million in recurrent funding to the Adult Lifestyle Support Program. This funding enabled an additional 177 adults with a disability to be supported. The additional funding brought the total allocation for the Adult Lifestyle Support Program to \$47.7 million with a total number of individuals supported to 1,319. An additional \$6.5 million will be provided recurrently in 2005-06 to assist adults with a disability to access these disability supports. The ALSP provides support to adults with a disability to maintain living arrangements, build and strengthen social relationships and increase participation in the community. The program is for adults aged between the ages of 18 and 65 with a disability as defined under the Disability Services Act 1992. Funding is generally provided on a recurrent basis and some individuals may receive a combination of recurrent and non-recurrent funding while others may require only non-recurrent funding to provide time-limited support to assist with their transition to community life.

It is true that currently people with a disability must apply for each DSQ program that might meet their needs, such as an Adult Lifestyle Support Program. I want to point out that it is only one of the many programs available to people. I propose that in the future people with a disability will need to complete only one application form to apply for a specialist disability service. Their needs will be assessed by DSQ professional staff and appropriate services will be provided on a prioritisation of needs basis.

You would be aware that we have out in the community now the *Have your say* document, which we are calling for comment upon. The whole idea of putting that document out for comment is to streamline our service delivery process. It became acutely obvious to me as minister that by having tight programs and having people having to apply to specific programs, for a whole range of reasons they may miss out on that program and therefore get nothing; whereas it is more important for us, I think, as a department, as a government and as a caring community to deliver services to people for their need rather than lock them into programs and engage in some sort of backwards and forwards as to whether or not they comply.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: What type of accommodation is available for people who do not own their own home when their primary carer, such as a parent, passes away?

Mr PITT: This issue of ageing carers with ageing children who have become clients of my department is a major issue and it has been the subject of a great deal of discussion at ministerial level—at our ministerial conferences.

I remember that one of the first questions I was asked by you in parliament was on this particular issue and I told you that I would follow it through. The 2005-06 state budget introduced a range of new early intervention programs and support for the disability sector, including succession planning for families. The government has allocated \$1 million in recurrent funding for this initiative in 2005-06 as part of \$6 million over four years.

Succession planning for families involves mapping out the support needs of a person with a disability over their expected lifetime and putting a plan in place to ensure that informal support networks are established for the person for life. Benefits accrue to the individual, family and government. The individual and family have the assurance of a strong array of informal support throughout the person's life stages which is supplemented rather than replaced by formal support as required. This will provide better outcomes and greater certainty for the individual and family and prove less expensive to government than if the individual is dependent primarily on formal support.

The strategy is also capable of lessening the burden on aged carers with adult dependants with disabilities. The new funding will allow Disability Services Queensland to pilot the strategy for a full 12-month period followed by an assessment of the pilot's success. I think it is fair to say that there is a fair deal of angst amongst ageing carers as to what will happen when they depart this earth.

Miss ELISA ROBERTS: Especially in terms of accommodation. Do you think it will be public housing?

Mr PITT: As we move through the manner in which we address those issues, this will be one of the dynamics. We will have to find strategies that match that. The important role that carers play has been acknowledged in the development of the Queensland government's carer recognition policy which was released in 2003. DSQ is leading the work across state government agencies, in consultation with key stakeholders, to implement strategies under the policy that will make a difference to the lives of carers.

There is no doubt that as part of that strategy we will be talking to Housing, both state Housing and other NGOs, about other forms of accommodation for people. At this stage we have an MOU with the Department of Housing. I think it would be fair to say that Minister Swarten's department has been very responsive to the needs of Disability Services Queensland to assist people either in crisis or in situations where we may just not be able to cover their circumstances, but a compassionate arrangement regarding accommodation needs to be found.

Mr KNUTH: I believe this issue is very important for rural and regional Queenslanders, especially given the tyranny of distance. I refer to page 2-14 of the MPS at the output relating to support for children and families. What is the estimated number of families who care for a child or adult with a disability who are currently not able to access regular respite services?

Mr PITT: You are so right that the issue of respite services is very important and becomes more critical the further you move away from the major population centres. I believe that no-one has yet come up with an appropriate response for some of our more remote areas, and especially for people who live on properties remote from even small townships across western Queensland. I do not have the answer to that, Mr Knuth. If you can provide some information which will assist me in that respect, I would greatly appreciate it.

In 2004-05 there were around 140 respite service outlets funded by Disability Services Queensland. An additional eight are operated by the Accommodation Support and Respite Services directorate of Disability Services Queensland. Around 90 of these respite centres provide services to both adults and children. We can list them for you. There are nine respite services in the Darling Downs and south-west Queensland region, there are seven in far-north Queensland, seven in the Fitzroy-central Queensland region, five in the Mackay-Whitsunday region, 10 in Moreton, 11 in north Queensland, seven on the Sunshine Coast and eight in the Wide Bay-Burnett region. That is a total of 59.

As well as respite through the non-government sector, DSQ continues to provide centre based respite services to 400 families of adults and children with a disability at eight centres across the state. Respite services are located at Loganholme, Nerang, Boondall, Nambour, Townsville and there are three services in the Ipswich area. In 2001 the state government made a commitment to upgrade or replace existing services on the Sunshine Coast, Ipswich and the Gold Coast. The replacement of the department's Gold Coast facility was completed last financial year. From that listing you would see that we have not confined this to the metropolitan area. Those services are being delivered right across the state.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to the development of a framework regarding the admission of young people to aged care facilities as mentioned on page 2-10 of the MPS. When is it expected that young people will be provided with accommodation options that allow them to leave nursing homes? What options are currently being considered?

Mr PITT: The member has touched on an issue which is very close to my heart. As a former teacher I am fully aware of a young student of mine, now in his late 20s, who is in a nursing home after a failed suicide attempt. There was no other option for him. It was not a case of the parents placing him in there to get him 'out of sight, out of mind'; there was just no other option in far-north Queensland. I am also aware of a young footballer I refereed on past occasions who had a massive heart attack. As a side effect of that, he is now not in touch with the real world. Both of those personal experiences of mine are inappropriately placed in aged care facilities. Their social contact is limited. They need to be there in the current climate because that is where they can get the medical attention that is appropriate for them. However, that is not good enough. You will be aware that the Commonwealth just recently made a major announcement that I will allude to in a moment.

In May 2005 there were approximately 228 people under 50 years of age living in Queensland residential aged care facilities. To put this in perspective, these residents accounted for less than one per cent of the total residential care population in Queensland. There may be a range of reasons younger people access aged care facilities, including the need for nursing care, intensive level of personal care or support, geographic location, individual or family choices or limited alternatives to meet the younger person's needs.

A younger person with a disability who has high medical or clinical support needs due to degenerative diseases such as muscular dystrophy, motor neurone disease or the early onset of Alzheimer's may enter an aged care facility because of their medical needs. The Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement specifies that Disability Services Queensland is not funded to provide services with a medical or specialist clinical focus.

An aged care assessment team, which recommends the level of medical and clinical care, assesses all people entering an aged care facility. Data from Queensland Health indicates that from January to December 2004 there were 335 people under 50 years of age referred to an aged care assessment team. Approximately half of the people assessed were recommended to remain living in the community, a further 33 per cent were recommended for high care—formerly known as nursing home care—and the remaining people were recommended for low care, formerly aged care hostels, or other support.

The Queensland government is committed to working with the Commonwealth government on the aged care-disability interface as part of the Commonwealth-state-territory disability bilateral agreement. There has been an interesting breakthrough. We as a department have worked with Queensland Health to do a stocktake of the number of young people under 50 who are in our own facilities. We have commenced engaging the Commonwealth and Commonwealth funded age cared facilities to try to get an indication of the total number of people and their specific needs. Most importantly, just recently at the COAG conference the Commonwealth, through the Prime Minister, has committed to placing this issue high on the agenda. A process which I thought was going to take several years now looks like being fast-tracked, as it deserves to be.

Mr KNUTH: Basically, the state and the Commonwealth government are working together to look for other options rather than aged care facilities?

Mr PITT: There has to be other options, because besides the range of needs people may have the social and emotional needs of people are important. A young person has every right to be able to engage in living arrangements. They need to come into contact with people of their own age cohort. In an aged care facility, that is not always possible. It is not as simple as just taking people out of an aged care facility and putting them in another facility because some people will have high and complex medical and clinical needs. There will not be an alternate option that will be suitable for everyone. That will be a difficult issue for us all to work through and, may I say, a very expensive issue for both the Commonwealth and state.

Mr KNUTH: I totally agree with you, Minister. I refer to page 2-17 of the MPS and the departmental output relating to community and infrastructure support. What amount of funding is available to assist community support workers and volunteers to undergo additional training? How many people were assisted last financial year?

Mr PITT: So the gist of your question is that you want to know what we are doing to provide our staff with the required skills and support to carry out their duties.

Mr KNUTH: That is right.

Mr PITT: The Disability Sector Training Fund is a key strategy to improve the quality of service delivery to people with a disability in Queensland by increasing the skills level of disability support workers. In 2004-05 the government allocated \$525,313 in recurrent funding to that training fund. An additional \$223,125 in non-recurrent funding was provided to the Queensland Community Services and

Health Industries Training Council to provide additional specific training. This was provided through training funds from Project 300 and the Residential Support Program in the amount of \$173,125 and \$50,000 respectively. Also during 2004-05 approximately 140 courses and workshops on a wide range of topics such as future planning, dual diagnosis, multidisabilities, communication skills and cultural diversity have been delivered in cities throughout Queensland. The disability sector is one of the top three high growth employment areas in the health and community services industries. The fund recognises this and reflects the government's priorities for a Smart State and more jobs for Queenslanders.

The fund is auspiced by the Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council. The council uses a community engagement model to support 10 regional training coalitions throughout Queensland to determine training and skills development priorities at a local level. Membership of the regional coalition includes people with a disability, parents, carers, service providers—all different disability types are represented. The investment in the fund is a clear example of the Queensland government's commitment to building the capacity of the disability services sector to make fundamental improvements to the lives of people with disabilities. I think it is fair to say that if we are going to truly provide quality services to people with a disability we also have to ensure that the people who are providing those services have the most up-to-date and modern training. The quality standards roll-out can also be used for training. I might just ask our deputy director-general, Bette Kill, to comment on that.

Ms Kill: In 2004-05 \$1.66 million was provided to disability service providers to assist them to plan, develop, implement and maintain their internal quality systems. This funding included \$1.1 million to service providers to assist them in their internal quality management systems, including training, \$377,000 to ACROD, a state peak body, to provide service providers and on-the-ground support and training sections, as well as \$132,000 for the development and distribution of information tools and kits for service providers on delivering quality services.

Mr KNUTH: Thank you very much. I refer to the Residential Support Program mentioned on page 2-10 of the MPS. What is the number of people who were displaced as a result of changes to hostel accommodation operations? How have those people been assisted?

Mr PITT: This is a very important issue. As you know, a significant number of people with a disability have been housed traditionally in some of these hostels. There have been pressures that have come to bear that have meant that some of these hostels have closed. I will elaborate on that as I give the rest of my answer.

The Residential Support Program is a joint initiative between Disability Services Queensland and Queensland Health to support people with a disability living in private residential services such as hostels and boarding houses. The program is operating in the five sites with the highest concentration of private residential services in Queensland—Brisbane, Ipswich, Toowoomba, Townsville and the Gold Coast. In 2005 DSQ provided recurrent funding of \$2.1 million for implementation and evaluation of the program. Queensland Health contributed \$500,000 in recurrent funding. An additional amount of \$50,000 nonrecurrent was also provided through the Residential Support Program for training for disability service providers.

The funds were provided to the Disability Sector Training Fund for consultation with service providers in the provision of training. These funds will be allocated for training on a recurrent basis in 2005-06. Additional recurrent funding of \$400,000 in 2005-06 and \$1.2 million in 2006-07 has been allocated to the Residential Support Program as part of a Queensland government election commitment. This will increase the funding base for the program to \$3.7 million by 2006-07.

During 2004-05 an evaluation of the resident support program was completed by the University of New South Wales consortium which includes the Social Policy Research Centre, Disability Studies and Research Institute and the University of Queensland. The evaluation findings identified the program as flexible and responsive to residents' needs and has increased their access to health, welfare and community services. Residents expressed high levels of satisfaction with the program, including an improved satisfaction with accommodation. The program was found to have assisted some residents to move to more appropriate accommodation or away from abusive situations. To date, in 2004-05, 30 people with disabilities who have been affected by hostel closures have been assisted to find suitable alternate accommodation.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to the departmental output support for adults on page 2-8 of the MPS. What is the number of clients remaining at the Basil Stafford Centre and is it envisaged that these remaining clients will be relocated into the community?

Mr PITT: You would be aware, member for Charters Towers, that some years ago the government took a very appropriate decision to deinstitutionalise many people. That program has been an ongoing program. You would be aware of Project 300. You and I have discussed that on an occasion before today. That has resulted in people being placed more appropriately within the community and within facilities more suitable to their arrangements.

There are currently 13 long-term residents with high and complex support needs living at that centre. Three people with high and complex support needs are also residing there on a short-term emergency basis. The government has given a commitment to build new housing at Wacol for long-term residents whose families wish for them to remain in that area. It is the policy of the department to try to place people where it is most appropriate for them to obtain the services that are provided but also to keep them in touch with their own families because, as you know, we are living in a regional area. Sometimes the services are a long way away and I guess it is my responsibility as a minister to try to match service delivery with access to family on an ongoing basis, but we are committed to providing additional accommodation for those people.

CHAIR: That completes that particular block of non-government questions, Minister. Minister, if I could take you to page 2-3 of the MPS where it talks about legislative reform, I was wondering if you could explain to the committee how this will help reduce abuse and neglect and if there are any sector reforms planned.

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. This government takes prevention of abuse and neglect of people with disabilities very seriously indeed. We are committed to strengthening the government's role and ensuring that people with disabilities are treated fairly and are treated with dignity. As part of this commitment, Disability Services Queensland is undertaking a review of the Disability Services Act 1992. The aim is to improve protective measures for people with disabilities.

Over the past financial year, DSQ undertook a range of activities to progress that review, including extensive consultation and investigating strategies to minimise the risk of abuse and neglect. The results of the consultation were analysed and used to develop a package of legislative reforms which were endorsed by the Queensland government in May. The package of reforms will underpin the proposed strengthened legislation which will focus on enhancing the safety of people with disabilities who access services funded by the government. Drafting of that bill will begin soon. Next month there will be a series of targeted consultation sessions with representatives from the community, the disability sector and service providers to obtain feedback on the draft disability bill. Feedback from this consultation will be considered when finalising the bill in October 2005. The bill is scheduled to be introduced into parliament in November, with the new legislation commencing operation from 1 July 2006.

Members would be aware of the serious allegations of abuse and neglect of people with disabilities at Care Independent Living Association at Bribe Island. Despite the seriousness of those allegations, the government discovered there were insufficient regulatory powers available to us. I must tell you that came as a complete surprise to me. I had this view, as minister, of being able to walk in and do something constructive for those people and found that the legal authority did not exist. I directed DSQ to explore the options for a stronger regulatory regime to protect people receiving services not funded by the state government and, as a result, the department comprehensively reviewed licensing and regulatory regimes for disability services and for comparable industries. This review identified the aspects of regulation that would most likely improve protection and safety for vulnerable people with disabilities.

In May 2005 the government, as I said, engaged an external consultant to undertake a national competition policy public benefit test. That test will be completed in October and it will include a comprehensive public consultation process to ensure community participation in the review. Hopefully, we will have legislation that will ensure people who are receiving services from the state are fully protected, people who are receiving services from non-government organisations funded by the state are as protected as we can make them and, depending on that public benefit test, it may even be people who are residing in accommodation or receiving services that are not funded by the state. We may be able to cover them as well.

Mr WILSON: Minister, you spoke earlier in your opening statement fairly passionately about spinal injury. I refer to pages two to 10 of the MPS, and I ask: could you outline further how people with spinal injuries will be assisted to return to community life from acute care?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. I am more than pleased to be able to talk about this Queensland-first initiative. I do not think it is occurring anywhere else in Australia. I could be corrected on that but indications I have had from the Spinal Injuries Association would indicate that this is an Australian first. The government has provided recurrent funding of \$1.5 million in 2005-06 to implement strategies to improve the lives of people with acquired spinal injuries. This will enable us to do two broad things: firstly, to enable the continuity of care and support for people upon discharge from the state spinal injuries unit in Brisbane; also, it will assist people with spinal disabilities to best resume their lives upon their return to life in their communities.

The funding will mean that for the first time in Queensland people with acquired spinal injuries will be able to return to community life with the surety of ongoing community based disability support. This will give people the best possible chance to resume their lives with their own families and develop informal support networks in the community. The funding will also allow for the establishment of community networks of people with spinal injuries which could offer assistance in a range of ways. They can do this by creating links between people with disabilities and their local community services, by

developing peer support networks and communities for people returning to the community from acute care and by leading the development of inclusive communities across the state. A key part of this initiative is forums where individuals with spinal disabilities, their families and carers can discuss problems and solutions to issues that are impacting on their lives.

The spinal injuries initiative is based on finding local solutions to local issues. By developing networks, community capacity support and work alongside people with disabilities has increased, which in turn provides positive outcomes that benefit everyone in the community. It is my hope that the initiatives developed as a result of this new funding will evolve to serve as early intervention measures. We want to support people with spinal injuries, wherever they are in Queensland, in what is often a difficult and sometimes an extremely painful transition back to life in the community. This, in my view, is a time in a person's life when they need to be able to access easily the appropriate resources, services and support, and this is the outcome we want to see achieved from the new funding.

The people I spoke to said their greatest concern was what will happen next, and they felt that they would get discharged from hospital and then have to start the process of finding accommodation, therapy and other services linking in with networks and so on. Whilst they are in hospital, that adds an extra burden upon their recovery. This process means that we will actually go to them whilst they are in hospital and start that process with them and their families or carers prior to their being released from hospital. I think that will give them a sense of security and will also, I am sure, assist families to assist their own loved ones to better come back into the community and lead fulfilling lives.

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Minister. Can I take you to page 2-13 of the MPS, which refers to respite services? How have respite services been enhanced across the state?

Mr PITT: I am pleased to advise the committee that in 2004-05 Disability Services Queensland provided an initial \$2.5 million to enhance 21 existing respite services funded by the department. This enhancement will support more than 350 additional families who care for children or adults with disabilities. The additional funding will increase the availability of respite services, particularly during peak periods such as weekends and school holidays. The enhanced services were selected by a set criteria with a demonstrated ability to respond to identified support needs in the local community. This additional funding was part of a total allocation of \$23.5 million to support 95 non-government respite services across the state. These respite and family support services provide a critical role in keeping families together. They strengthen the family's ability to care for its family member with a disability.

Respite services provide a range of supports to families depending upon need. These can include in-home support, centre based respite, community based support, host family respite, vacation programs, sibling support, parenting support, emergency respite and other appropriate supports. I am happy to advise the committee that this government has provided additional funding for 2005-06 of \$4.5 million recurrent plus \$1 million equity and \$670,000 in non-recurrent funding for respite services to assist carers of children or adults with disabilities. This will increase the recurrent funding base for respite services from \$23.5 million in 2004-05 to \$28 million recurrent by 2006-07.

In addition, land has been purchased in Hervey Bay for the construction of a new respite facility that is expected to support up to 60 families in the area. Design and planning for this facility has commenced. Draft design standards have been developed for the construction of the Sunshine Coast and Townsville facilities, and the tendering process will begin later this year. Options for the replacement of the Jefferis Turner facility at Ipswich are currently being explored. These developments, both in the government and non-government sectors, are a clear indication of this government's commitment to the provision of respite services. I think we all must understand that when someone has a disability and requires intensive care, there is an enormous burden placed upon their carers and their families, and I think it is an area where providing respite for the carers is just as important as providing a time away from family for the people with disabilities who may need that as well.

Mr FENLON: Minister, you have already made some reference today to children with disabilities needing out-of-home care, which is referred to at page 2-13 of the MPS. Can we now be confident that this matter will be resolved?

Mr PITT: There has been a number of very challenging issues that have come before me since being appointed this portfolio, and the issue of out-of-home care is one of the more difficult ones and one of the more traumatic ones for all concerned. Circumstances where a family has indicated they are seeking out-of-home care for their child with a disability who has complex support needs are very sensitive and it is a very important issue to all concerned. I welcome the opportunity to outline to the committee the role that Disability Services Queensland will play in maximising the opportunity to support children with disabilities and complex needs to the fullest extent possible within the family home.

The department is working primarily with the departments of Communities and Child Safety to look into potential models of out-of-home care and other support services that avoid parents relinquishing care of their child with a disability. Unfortunately, families who find themselves in this situation quite often face the option of relinquishing their child to the care of the state as the last resort. I can assure members of the committee that it is my intention to make that a last resort and try to provide other alternate programs that will keep the family together. I think that is vital.

The aim of this work is to build up a continuum of support whereby parents of children with disabilities can retain guardianship and continue to be involved in all significant decisions in their child's life. This approach supports the call made in the Crime and Misconduct Commission's report for strong and enduring partnerships and that gaps and duplication in the service continuum be identified and eliminated. I anticipate that an announcement will be made later this year as to the support for families in this most difficult situation.

Other actions DSQ has taken to implement the CMC's recommendations regarding child safety include participation in two pilots of the new suspected child abuse and neglect system in Logan and Townsville, the appointment of a child safety director, the completion of a departmental child safety monitoring plan in cooperation with the Commissioner for Children and Young People and Child Guardian, and development of behavioural therapeutic services for children with disabilities in the care of the state and specialist disability assessment services for children entering the care of the state.

A child safety project team was also established to develop and implement two new services identified in the blueprint for implementing the recommendations of the report. These new initiatives involve the provision of specialist disability assessments for children with disabilities entering the care of the Department of Child Safety and the behaviour support services for children with disabilities in the care of the Department of Child Safety. I would like to assure the committee that I am committed to addressing this very important issue. We have, over the last several months, had a number of cases whereby we have tried extremely hard to find a solution for people faced with this situation. However, I think it is very important that we find a legal framework that means that those solutions are not the result of people scrambling to find a solution. The solution should be the result of a careful and measured approach to providing the care needed for the child with the disability and providing the assurances the family needs that their child will remain part of their family for as long as they can.

Mr FENLON: Minister, page 2-17 of the MPS refers to providing \$12.8 million in funding to NGOs. Can you please explain the final outcomes with regard to the Endeavour Foundation and its unfunded services?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. I think we all recognise that the Endeavour Foundation provides wonderful support and has done so in providing services to over 3,000 people. I am very pleased that this government has been able to support this work by providing over \$40 million in funding to Endeavour in 2004-05. Last year Endeavour announced its decision to cease operating four adult training and support services and seven residential services that have been unfunded by the Queensland government. This presented the government with a serious challenge and one which had the potential to impact severely on 116 clients. I might add that being unfunded by the government does not mean that the government turned its back on them. Those people had not been assessed by the government as requiring those services and Endeavour had taken it upon itself to provide services to them.

As I said, this presented the government with a serious challenge and one which had the potential to impact severely on 116 clients. I gave a commitment at the time that no client would be left homeless and no client would be without a day service. DSQ worked closely with clients and their parents, their families and carers in relation to the Endeavour closures. In addition, I met personally with parents and families of some clients and on several occasions with representatives of Endeavour parent groups. A small number of clients were able to be relocated with the approval of their families or carers to vacancies in other services and \$338,000 was provided in recurrent funding for these relocations.

The government undertook an expression of interest process for the services scheduled for closure, with the Caloundra adult training and support service chosen as a trial. The expression of interest submitted by Centacare was successful, and the feedback we have received has been very positive. This process was repeated for the other services earmarked for closure. The successful bidders for the three remaining adult training and support services were Centacare and Multicap. There were three successful bidders for the seven residential services—Cerebral Palsy League of Queensland, Centacare and Endeavour itself.

The department has approved an amount of \$637,716 for the ongoing operation of three residential services located at Corinda and two at Coopers Plains to be managed by Endeavour. It is estimated that \$3.7 million will be required on a recurrent funding basis for the four adult training and support services and seven residential services. The level of support is guaranteed and clients and their families and carers can feel secure in these new arrangements. We are working very closely with Endeavour to assist them in developing a comprehensive five-year business plan. This business plan will provide a blueprint for the ongoing partnership between the Queensland government and Endeavour.

Even though it was a traumatic period both for the clients concerned and for the Endeavour organisation, I think everyone has come out of this reasonably well off: the clients have services that are quality services appropriate to their needs; very few people's lives have been dislocated; but, more importantly, Endeavour through this process will be a much stronger organisation and a very good partner for government into the future.

CHAIR: Minister, in 'Future Developments' on page 2-14 of the MPS there is mention of children with autism. Can you inform the committee whether anything has been done to assist these children this financial year and also what are the plans for the future?

Mr PITT: Yes, I can. Disability Services Queensland remains committed to funding a range of services and support for adults and children with a disability, including those with autism spectrum disorder. This includes: family and early childhood teams to provide early intervention and therapy services to families who have a child under six with autism and a significant developmental delay; respite and family support services to provide short-term breaks for families and carers; through local area coordination, coordinators who support families and individuals in the more remote areas of Queensland to link with a range of community services and supports; by way of professional and specialist services, professional teams to support children or adults, including people with autism and their families, to access a range of services and supports in their community; accommodation support services, whereby we are able to assist individuals with a disability to live more independently in their community; and the family support program, which supports 950 families with a child or adult with complex disability support needs, including those with autism, to strengthen the family's capacity to continue their caring role.

An estimated 25 per cent of families who receive recurrent funding under the family support program will support a child or an adult with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder either as a primary or secondary disability. I am pleased to advise committee members that in the 2005-06 budget the Queensland government provided \$4 million over four years, including \$1 million in recurrent funding for 2005-06, for early intervention strategies for families caring for children under five years with autism. The early intervention and diagnosis will play a crucial role in the effective treatment of autism in young children under five.

There is a body of medical evidence out there that would indicate that, as most of us know, if we can intervene early in someone's life we have a greater chance of making a long-term impact. It would appear with autism that if early intervention can be achieved there is a chance that some of the symptoms of autism can be better controlled, allowing the individual to lead a more fulfilling life—and I am sure that would relieve a lot of pressure on their families and loved ones. The initiative is therefore a very positive step in delivering better outcomes for children living with autism and their families.

In addition, DSQ provided more than \$2 million in recurrent funding and more than \$300,000 in non-recurrent funding to the Autism Association of Queensland. The department's innovative funding initiative has recently allocated funds to the Autism Early Intervention Outcomes Unit Inc. to provide an early intervention program for young people. Autism Behavioural Intervention Queensland is also funded by my department to provide training workshops to the general community in an effort to expand understanding about the effects of autism spectrum disorder.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We might return now to a block of non-government questions.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to the departmental output 'Support for Adults' on page 2-8 of the MPS. What is the number of instances of abuse or harm that have been reported involving clients from the Basil Stafford Centre in the last financial year and can you provide an outline of these incidents?

Mr PITT: As I said earlier, I take any form of abuse and neglect very seriously. Of course, if it occurs within the context of a facility that is run or staffed by people from my own department it is really important that I do. Unfortunately, I do not have the exact figures that you require. Could you put that question on notice so that instead of trying to talk around the issue I can provide you with the exact figures?

Mr KNUTH: I will do so, Minister. In part, you have answered this question. I refer to departmental output 'Support for Adults' on page 2-8 of the MPS. How many clients have received funding packages as part of the institutional reform process and how often have these clients had their funding and support requirements revised?

Mr PITT: This is Project 300, whereby the clients with an intellectual disability who had previously been institutionalised were allowed to resume their lives within the community with support from the government. As I said, Project 300 assists people with a psychiatric disability to transition from Queensland Health extended treatment facilities back into community living. In 2004-05, Disabilities Services Queensland worked with Queensland Health to enable an additional 14 people to enter the program. This increased the number of adults supported through the program to 224.

In 2004-05, DSQ expended \$150,000 in recurrent funding to the consumer participation project. The consumer participation project relates to the election commitment to developing community infrastructure to foster inclusive communities. The consumer participation project assists Project 300 clients and stakeholders to develop strategies to increase individual involvement with service provision.

In 2004-05, DSQ expended \$200,000 in recurrent funding for the training of direct care support workers in the psychiatric disability field. This funding is now administered by the Queensland Community Services and Health Industries Training Council through the Disability Sector Training Fund. In 2004-05, \$200,000 in recurrent funding from Project 300 was provided to advocacy support for

people with a psychiatric disability. An additional \$1.4 million in non-recurrent funding was allocated in 2004-05 to assist service providers supporting people with a psychiatric disability to plan, develop, implement and maintain their internal quality systems.

The overall budget for institutional reform initiatives is \$22.7 million. You were asking about whether or not they had their cases revised?

Mr KNUTH: Yes.

Mr PITT: All of these situations are dynamic. No-one is just left hanging in a situation. Everyone is in contact with their support providers and there is continuous revision. It is not a matter of just doing a stocktake every year or two years. People's circumstances change—sometimes over a long period of time; sometimes quite dramatically. It is very important that those people involved with us in this project are alert and able to read those signs and act appropriately at the time. Throughout the process, DSQ investigates the information and training needs of disability service providers in the area of psychiatric disability. We also look at the pathways for transition and coordination between mental health and disability services and we look at the mechanisms for individualised planning, with a focus on early response in that service delivery process. That is what I was talking about before.

CHAIR: We might just swing back in the last five minutes before lunch and have a couple of quick questions from government members. Minister, page 2-4 of the MPS refers to succession planning. Could you inform the committee what this involves and how many people this initiative will assist?

Mr PITT: It is really a pleasure for me to talk about these first-time initiatives for Queensland. The 2005-06 budget introduces a range of new early intervention programs and support for the disability sector, including succession planning for families. The government has allocated \$1 million in recurrent funding for this initiative in 2005-06. Succession planning for families involves mapping out the support needs of a person with a disability over their expected lifetime and putting a plan in place to ensure that informal support networks are established for the person for life. As I said before, benefits do accrue to the individual, the family and the government. I believe that this is probably a similar question to that which was asked before by a non-government member.

Families who have a loved one who may themselves be ageing and the carers themselves who may be ageing go through a period of concern regarding what will happen to the people they care for after they are gone. Succession planning allows early progress to be made on mapping out a person's life and meeting contingencies as they occur. I had the pleasure last year of attending a workshop which was a result of funding we had provided to one of the local universities to carry out this work. The enthusiasm of the non-government sector regarding the concept of succession planning was quite obvious at the time.

I think we have a responsibility as a society to give people some surety as best we can. There is no such thing as absolute surety in life, but through successful succession planning we are able to at least allay some of the fears that people may have and also look at some of the things that may lay in front of them throughout the life of their loved one who has a disability and try to ensure that the support mechanisms that are available out there through both the government sector and the non-government sector are going to be able to be appropriately drawn upon at any particular time to meet those needs. As I said at the outset, succession planning is a very important initiative and for us to now formalise this and fund the process to the extent that we have I think is going to bring a lot of comfort to families right across Queensland.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 2-4 of the MPS has a section titled 'Strengthening Non-Government Organisations'. How do NGOs get to be included in these programs?

Mr PITT: I have to say to the member for Cook that this is something I am very excited about. When I first raised the issue of non-government organisations in Queensland being in strife and us as a government trying to find a way of strengthening their capacity, I was told that it had been tried before. There are so many reports and so much data out there that have gone nowhere. I may be a little pig-headed but I was determined that we would actually attack this in a very structured way. The result is that we have this year in the budget a Strengthening NGOs project adequately funded with the broad support of the sector and a broad understanding of some of the achievements we can arrive at if we all work together.

This year's state budget delivered an additional \$10 million in recurrent funding for 2005-06, increasing to \$20 million in recurrent funding in 2006-07 to strengthen the capability and capacity of the non-government sector providing disability support. Over the past four years, the government has provided assistance to address concerns about the continued financial viability of the non-government sector, and unfortunately the response that most likely was given was that people were given some money to tide them over. Unfortunately, that meant that we were tiding people over until the next crisis, because the crisis was not going away. The reason they were in that position was maintained, so we had to do something that was far more structured, and hence the Strengthening NGOs project.

This budget marks the next stage in our strategy to assist this sector—proactive and positive strategies that will assist non-government organisations to improve their capacity and capability to provide high-quality, accountable services to Queenslanders with a disability and their families and

carers. This initiative focuses on developing contemporary business and administrative practices. It focuses on improving the effectiveness of the operational service delivery and on improving the capacity of the NGO sector to meet performance and accountability expectations.

The initiative is made up of four parts. One is developing the planning skills of non-government organisations. This includes developing an organisation's capability in planning around individuals and groups as well as the types of services and supports required. There is succession planning around the work force itself. There is planning around disability types, future support requirements and provider capacity. There are benefits of working with other providers and the use of mainstream community services.

The second part is establishing new or expanded services where there are identified gaps in service delivery by assisting existing providers to expand the services they provide or to expand the location within which they operate, and developing the ability of new service providers to deliver a particular service in an identified location.

The third part is developing the work force planning and development capacity of the disability sector, and this is done through general organisational training including sound governance practices, financial management, business planning, human resource management, information and technology management, and technical professional work force development.

The fourth part is establishing the capacity of non-government providers to acquire and/or replace the assets they have. Some \$1.5 million in recurrent funding is allocated in 2005-06, increasing to \$3 million in recurrent funding in 2006-07, to provide capital grants to NGOs for assets that will enable them to provide a quality service.

Proceedings suspended from 12.52 pm to 1.51 pm

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Communities, Disability Services and Seniors. We will continue with the examination of the area of disabilities. We will have a 10-minute block of questions from non-government members.

Mr PITT: With your indulgence, Chair, could I provide for the information of the committee an answer to a question asked of me by the member for Charters Towers in relation to Basil Stafford. I think you asked about the number of instances of abuse and neglect involving Basil Stafford clients over the last 12 months. In relation to the question that I did take on notice, I have already provided an answer to non-government question on notice No. 7, part (a) of which stated that from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005 the department received 16 allegations of abuse, harm and neglect of people with a disability by staff of services provided by Disability Services Queensland. That is a total of 16 across the state. Attachment 1, which we were supplied in relation to that question on notice, lists the nature of the complaint and what action was taken in each instance. It is in this format for you. However, your question is more particular than that now. I can tell you, though, that three of those allegations did not relate to the Basil Stafford Centre. If at any time you want me to provide confidential information in respect of that, I am quite prepared to do so.

Mr KNUTH: Thanks, Minister. I have a question that I asked earlier but we ran out of time. I asked this question in regard to support for adults: how many clients have received funding packages as part of the institutional reform process, and how often have these clients had their funding and support requirements revised? I just wanted to pass on that these support requirements are revised. I believe this is a big issue with regard to Project 300, where we have seen a lot of people who were institutionalised put through a program of deinstitutionalisation. A lot of these people who have been put out do not have friends to come and pick them up to take them to the football. They do not have people to take them to the movies like the average person. They have mild mental health problems. Some of them in meetings that I have attended have said that they would prefer to be back in institutions that they were once in due to the fact that they are with their friends and they are receiving treatment. I just wanted to pass that on to the department and you before I ask this next question.

Mr PITT: Community and support services are quite proficient and capable of providing links with the community. I think that would cover that in each individual case. As I said before, I do not want a system whereby on a set date or a set period of time we go around and review people's packages. I think that is destabilising and I do not think it is fair to people to be always under the microscope like that. I would prefer to have our staff work with people on a continuous basis and as the need arises for changes, which generally means their condition has deteriorated or they require more assistance. Unfortunately, in most of these cases, it does not go the other way. I guess there is the odd case where it does, but I would prefer our staff to be continuously working with our clients to meet the needs as they change along the track.

Mr KNUTH: I totally agree with you, Minister. I refer you to page 2-8 of the MPS and the Post School Services Program, which is designed to assist young people with a disability make the transition from school to adult life. What number of people were assisted under this program last financial year, and what amount of money is forecast to be spent this year?

Mr PITT: In 2004-05 Disability Services Queensland provided \$22.4 million for the Post School Services Program, increasing the number of people receiving support through the program to 1,547. This funding included an additional \$2.7 million recurrent to assist an extra 162 people to leave school and make the transition to life in their community. More than \$200,000 in non-recurrent funding was also provided to 59 people with a disability at 18 organisations for the purchase of items including braille writers, communication software, electric hoists and walking frames and other capital items to enhance service delivery for this target group.

The Post School Services Program supports young people with high and complex support needs to make the transition from student to adult life in their community. The Post School Services Program also assists young people to participate in and contribute to their own family life, to participate in a broad range of community activities and on a personal level to explore a range of interests and activities including vocational opportunities. Following a review of their circumstances, adults who have been in receipt of postschool transitional supports for five years will now transfer to support under the Adult Lifestyle Support Program at their previously approved level—so no change in level. In 2005-06 an additional \$3 million recurrent will be allocated to the Post School Services Program to assist young adults with a disability and their families to plan transitional supports when they leave school. This will increase the total budget from \$22.4 million to \$25.4 million.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to page 2-8 of the MPS and the intensive behaviour support initiative to support adults with complex behaviour support needs. What is the number of people that were assisted under this program last financial year, and what amount of money is forecast to be spent this year?

Mr PITT: The member would be aware that the range of clients we have with a disability is quite broad and that some people have very high and very complex needs, and quite often that manifests itself in severe behavioural problems which can not only cause danger to themselves because they are placed in circumstances where we normally would not expect them to be but also potentially impact upon our work force because they are charged with the responsibility of care and attention. Quite often there is some degree of conflict because the behavioural circumstances mean that the worker is a target. With people living in the community, we quite often have people coming into contact with other community members whereby, even if there is no net negative result, there is an apprehension about the behaviour of people.

In 2004-05 the government provided \$2 million for intensive behaviour support initiatives which support adults with a disability who have complex behavioural support needs. This funding is part of a total allocation of \$3.2 million recurrent to establish five new departmental teams and enhance an existing team to provide intensive behaviour support for adults with a disability. The teams will be located across the state, with a support team in Brisbane that will service the Brisbane region and provide specialist advice to the five regional teams. During 2004-05 a support team was established to manage the implementation of the initiative throughout the state. The intensive behaviour support teams offer a mix of both early intervention and targeted responses for individuals as well as training and development activities for organisations to assist them to better support individuals with complex and challenging behaviours.

The purposes of the team are threefold: firstly, to provide timely consultation, assessment and intervention in complex situations; secondly, to provide carers and individuals with preventative and early intervention strategies; and, thirdly, to increase the capacity of individuals to have their needs met within current support arrangements and within their own networks and, where possible, within their own community.

Each team will have particular expertise in human behaviour and communication to provide a professional service option for people with a disability who have complex support needs. The services provided by the teams will complement supports already available to individuals and families within the community. In 2005-06, \$535,000 in additional recurrent funds will be allocated to further establish the new teams and to enhance the existing team in Ipswich and the south-west Queensland region. Unspent funds from 2004-05 will be rolled over to 2005-06 to progress this work.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to page 2-10 of the MPS and the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program. What is the estimated number of young people that are proposed to receive assistance under this program? What support will be made available to them, and what is the total amount of funding allocated?

Mr PITT: In 2004-05, \$2 million in additional recurrent funds was allocated to the Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program. This additional funding assisted 15 young adults with a disability exiting the care of the state, bringing the total funding for the program to \$5.9 million and the total number of people supported through the program to 70.

The Young Adults Exiting the Care of the State Program commenced in 2002-03, and this is administered as part of the Adult Lifestyle Support Program. It provides disability support services for young adults exiting the care of the state to develop or maintain community living arrangements and to

access community life. An important element of the program involves forward planning within the Department of Child Safety to enable early identification of individuals who may be eligible for assistance through the program.

Coordination with the Department of Child Safety also allows for effective transition from being in care to community based living arrangements. That is one of the great challenges—to try to establish a continuum and make these changed arrangements as seamless as possible. The establishment of the program is in keeping with the government's election commitment to increase funding to adults and young people with a disability to address the high level of critical need identified in the community. Funding is generally provided on a recurrent basis. Some individuals may receive a combination of recurrent and non-recurrent funding, while others may only require non-recurrent funding to provide full-time, limited support to assist with their transition to community life.

Applications for support are reviewed by statewide funding panels, and they are prioritised in accordance with established criteria including eligibility, risk of homelessness and the adequacy of current support arrangements. An additional \$1.5 million will be allocated in 2005-06 to meet the needs of young adults with disabilities known to be exiting the care of the state. That will bring the total budget to \$7.4 million.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to page 2-5 of the MPS and the departmental outputs support for adults and support for children and families. What is the number of people currently on the registration of needs database? Can you provide a breakdown of those people according to their priority ratings?

Mr PITT: That question will have to be taken on notice, but I can tell you that irrespective of what weighting list or arrangement we have, unfortunately there will always be unmet need out there. I must at this point in time indicate to the member that I see the department changing focus in many ways. I know that we have had a proud and a long history of meeting crisis as it occurs. However, to meet crisis alone is not doing anything about the long-term solution for early intervention and prevention. I think you will see from looking at the budget initiatives we brought forward this year that there will be a renewed emphasis on intervening early in life when people have a disability to try to reduce the effects of their disability impacting upon them and making living in the community and living full lives a difficult task for them.

I have just been provided with some information that may be of assistance. At this stage a total of 15,710 people in Queensland receive a specialist disability service funded by DSQ. That was in the last financial year. The figure is growing every year. You would be aware that the Queensland government has allocated additional funding of \$68.5 million for 2005-06. We are whittling away at the unmet need, but at the same time we are trying to ensure that people coming into the system do so at a much slower rate and receive intervention programs much earlier in the piece before they get to the crisis stage.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to page 2-5 of the MPS and the departmental output support for adults and support for children and families. What other people listed as priority 1, priority 2 and priority 3 are not receiving funding at this moment?

Mr PITT: We do not have that data here right now, but I will take that one on notice and provide it for you—if we do indeed have that information.

Mr KNUTH: Thanks, Minister.

CHAIR: We might have a block of government questions now.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, I refer to MPS page 2-2. Could you explain the Commonwealth's offer on respite care and if this will result in any amendment of the Commonwealth-State-Territory Disability Agreement?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. In the 2004-05 federal budget speech the federal Treasurer announced that from 1 January 2005 the Howard government would provide \$72.5 million over four years to the states and territories to increase access to respite for ageing parents caring for adult children with a disability. This funding, however, is conditional—as are many things with the Commonwealth—on the states and territories providing matching funds. I make note of the fact that the Australian government did not consult the states nor the territories before announcing this initiative. It has a pretty good track record of going off and doing something then trying to lock the states in behind it.

The state government has started negotiations with the federal government on its offer. In developing a position for negotiation with the Commonwealth, the state government identified ways to maximise the potential benefits for the Queensland community. In addition to respite services, DSQ has been working to identify a broader range of services that have a similar effect to respite in providing ageing parents with relief from the day-to-day pressures of caring for a person with a disability. This government is committed to improving disability services. I think no-one in this room would doubt that our recent budget announcements both last year and this year are a testament to that.

Last year's state budget included an additional \$220 million of new funding over four years, and this year's budget added an extra \$180 million over four years on top of that. We are aware of, and are responding to, the particular needs of families who continue to care for their sons and daughters with a disability. That is why, in 2003-04, the Family Support Program was expanded to include families caring for an adult family member in their home.

We are putting Queensland's case for funding from the federal government. We are asking for it to be based on DSQ's current prioritisation model, not a targeted program, as preferred by the Commonwealth. Queensland is still negotiating with the federal government on this issue. Disability Services Queensland is developing a revised negotiating position on aged care as a respite initiative, which will address the outstanding differences that exist between the Queensland proposal and that proposal that is on offer by the federal government.

It is crucially important that we get this one right. It is not one of those things you say 'yes' or 'no' to. We have an obligation to make sure that we get the best possible deal for Queenslanders with a disability. Those best possible outcomes will be better enhanced by us taking the time to respond to the Commonwealth and actually getting it right.

CHAIR: Page 2-3 of the MPS refers to the regional disabilities councils. I was wondering if you could let the committee know how those councils are assisting you in being informed about issues facing people with disabilities.

Mr PITT: I must say that I am absolutely delighted with the work thus far of the councils. In July of last year cabinet endorsed the establishment of a new structure of advisory bodies to strengthen the government's capacity to seek and receive community advice on disability issues. Prior to that we had a Queensland Disability Council. I do not want to be flippant about this, but it was SEQ-centric and had very limited representation from across the regions of the state.

Regional representation through this new process was strengthened through the addition of a new Regional Disability Council, bringing the total number of regional councils to 10 to match the regions. These new regional disability councils have been given a stronger regional focus, and their capacity to advise me has been strengthened with the development of new roles and new responsibilities that focus on the identification of strategic regional issues and their involvement in consultation on new government initiatives.

In December last year the community members were appointed to positions on the councils. The chairperson of each Regional Disability Council is a member of the Queensland Disability Council. This ensures that all of Queensland's perspectives are considered when providing advice to me. The regional disability councils are an important platform for people with a disability and their families to identify issues and concerns, to provide advice, and to support consultation and participation at a local and regional level.

The new councils have recently engaged community members, facilitated public feedback and enabled people to have their say on improving disability services in Queensland. They will meet at least four times a year. Early indications are that some of these councils are meeting informally and are using the web to have as many one-to-one and informal meetings as they can. Some of the tasks of members of regional disability councils include contributing to the development of an annual work plan which outlines consultation and participation activities to be undertaken, participation in relevant personal and professional training in skill development activities, building and maintaining strong connections to the community, and also examining issues and suggesting innovative solutions. We are expecting them to be aware of community views and aspirations and to be able to represent broad community views. They will work closely with regional staff in the departments of both Communities and Disability Services. I want them to represent and promote the aims of the Regional Disability Council to the wider community.

In acknowledgement of their expanded role, time, commitment and expertise, members of the regional disability councils now receive payment of sitting fees consistent with the arrangements in place for the remuneration of government boards and committees. Prior to this it was all done gratis. Regional disability councils work collaboratively across the disability sector and the community, including with non-government, local, state and Commonwealth governments agencies, to identify needs and to improve access to supports and services for people with a disability. I believe that this is a great initiative, giving a say to people with a disability, particularly those in regional areas. I look forward to working closely with the regional councils and the state councils during my term of office.

Mr WILSON: Minister, at page 2-18 of the MPS Disability Action Week is mentioned. Are you able to tell us what is planned for this year's Disability Action Week?

Mr PITT: Without blowing the trumpet of DSQ and the organising committee too loudly, I believe that this year's Disability Action Week is going to be the best ever. It is a key community event in the Queensland disability sector calendar and for people who are not disabled. The week has become one of the state's largest grassroots events engaging state and local government agencies, the corporate and community sectors, and thousands of individuals in a statewide program of events and activities.

This year, Disability Action Week will be held between 17 and 23 July 2005, with the theme 'Changing Queensland'. The state launch of the week will be a community day held in Rockhampton with the support of local governments and community sponsors. I am very pleased to see us taking that can launch out of the capital city and into the regions.

There will be an extensive range of promotional resources that will be provided to community event organisers across the state to raise awareness of the week. A number of events and activities funded through the department's Building Inclusive Communities Program have already been planned

for Disability Action Week 2005. These are just some of the activities, but there is not a comprehensive list. There is a *Minority in majority art exhibition* and performances in the Queen Street Mall, an expo and market day in Bundaberg sponsored by Bundaberg Community Development, an education and awareness workshop conducted by Kowanyama Aboriginal Council, and a series of book launches hosted by Queensland Advocacy Inc of *Permission to shine* by Meriel Stanger, a woman with a brain injury.

Disability Action Week will culminate with the inaugural Queensland Disability Conference to be held at Conrad Jupiters conference centre on the Gold Coast from 22 to 23 July. That conference is entitled *Shared visions: exploring the future for disability in Queensland*. It will provide a forum that is open to all areas of the disability sectors including members of the regional disability councils.

Disability Action Week is organised by a state planning committee which comprises representatives of the disability sector, organisations, service groups, government departments and corporate sponsors. The committee anticipates that the level of sponsorship support this year will be more than double that of previous years.

During 2004-05 the department directed \$66,000 towards Disability Action Week awareness raising activities, and the 2004 awards program and preparation. An additional \$12,000 provided by government and corporate sponsors was also for dedicated promotional activity. I am proud to be involved in Disability Action Week which, through its focus on local action, has been a catalyst for lasting positive change in many Queensland communities. Unfortunately, I will not be able to attend the Rockhampton event. That will be launched by our Governor and my parliamentary secretary. I will be otherwise engaged at the Mater Hospital.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, I refer to page 2-3 of the MPS and ask: can you please give us an overview of the activities of the Queensland disability chairperson?

Mr PITT: This is a very important position, and I am very pleased with the appointment that we have made. I know that from time to time ministers make appointments and you sometimes wonder if you have done the right thing or not. I must say that I am delighted with the performance of our current chair, and I look forward to him staying in that position for some time to come.

In July 2004 the government endorsed a new model of engagement with Queenslanders on disability issues through, as I said, a new Disability Council of Queensland and the 10 regional disability councils. The Disability Council of Queensland itself—the state body—is the primary advisory body to me on disability issues. This council was strengthened by changing the membership to include the 10 regional chairs as members and through the appointment of an independent statewide chairperson. The chairperson, Mr Paul Larcombe, plays a pivotal role in the provision of high-quality advice to me on major initiatives and services for people with a disability and their families and carers. He also liaises with the Australian government Department of Family and Community Services and the National Disability Advisory Council. The chairperson also provides advice on the implementation of the Disability Service of Queensland's strategic plan—the Queensland Government Strategic Framework for Disability—and directions for strategic research in the disability field.

During the last financial year the chairperson provided leadership, established these 10 regional disability councils and enabled the provision of feedback from councils to the *Have your say: on improving disability services in Queensland* consultation. The chairman represented the council on the ministerial advisory committee, he represented students with disabilities and he attended national disability advisory body meetings.

Initiatives for the chairperson during 2005-06 include the development of a strategic plan for the Disability Council of Queensland and support for the first annual Disability Conference, *Sharing the vision*, at the Gold Coast, as I said, on 22 and 23 July. The chairperson has provided active leadership in the successful establishment of a new model for engagement with Queenslanders on disability issues. Positive and beneficial outcomes are anticipated for an ongoing partnership with the chairperson.

Mr Larcombe is extremely well qualified to provide leadership to the Disability Council. He has more than 10 years experience in the disability policy field. For the past two years he has been national coordinator of the Disability Discrimination Act Standards Project and is currently one of the directors of the board of Guide Dogs Queensland. I believe that he has brought to the role an enormous amount of energy and passion as well as very good qualifications.

Mr FENLON: Minister, I refer to MPS 2-17 where it refers to the Local Area Coordination Program. Does this program operate in Indigenous communities?

Mr PITT: In 2004-05 the department has worked to ensure that it delivers services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that are responsive, culturally appropriate and accessible. I believe that we have only just scratched the surface of the need to respond to Indigenous clients, particularly those who reside in the communities that were former DOGIT communities. There is a great deal of work yet to be done there. I make no bones about the fact that it is not going to be easy, but I do believe that if we approach this in the right way and are prepared to look at the way in which we deliver services

we will come up with the right delivery mechanism to meet the needs of those people. I can guarantee that what works in Queen Street will not work in Kowanyama, as the member for Cook will no doubt testify.

The department's Local Area Coordination Program operates in a number of rural and remote locations with significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations including Cooktown, Cunnamulla, Thursday Island, Charleville, Murgon and Mount Isa. In 2004-05 an additional four local area coordinator positions were endorsed including new positions in Innisfail, Charters Towers, Bowen and Proserpine, increasing the number of positions across the state from 35 to 39 and increasing the number of locations from 24 to 28.

During 2004-05 local area coordination assisted a total of 1,716 people and their families across the state. Some 29 per cent of those clients identified themselves as being Indigenous. In addition, a joint pilot project, the DSQ-Queensland Health Home and Community Care program, was completed in the Cape York Aboriginal community of Aurukun where 20 people with a severe or profound disability reside. The project examined good practice in disability service delivery models in a remote Aboriginal community. The project report was finalised in September 2004 and both departments will respond to those recommendations during 2005-06.

In 2004-05 the department finalised a reconciliation statement and action plan for 2004 to 2007 to build on existing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a disability, their families, carers and communities. Priority areas include accessible services and programs, communication mechanisms, employment opportunities, cultural awareness and the improved knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Implementation of the plan will continue throughout the next financial year. A six-monthly reporting process has been established and is scheduled to commence in September of this year. Disability Services Queensland continues to work in partnership with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and other state government agencies to achieve four key goals of the Queensland whole-of-government Indigenous policy, Partnerships Queensland. In closing, those four key goals are strong families, strong cultures; safe places; healthy living; and skilled and prosperous people and their communities.

CHAIR: Minister, that concludes the questions that members on both sides of the committee have to ask in relation to Disability Services. We propose to now move to a 20-minute block of questions from non-government members. The member for Burdekin has joined us and will address some Seniors issues. I call the honourable member for Burdekin.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Good afternoon, Minister, and departmental staff. I refer to page 1-20 of the MPS and the administration of the Seniors Card. Minister, what is the total cost of administering the Seniors Card?

Mr PITT: In broad terms, the Seniors Card has been well received by seniors throughout Queensland. It is not a purely Queensland initiative. I remember that in the early years when I was first elected to parliament it is something we copied from other states, but I think we have refined it—as Queenslanders normally do—to make it even better for our own clientele.

Mrs MENKENS: I agree that it is good.

Mr PITT: I will let you know what the budget has been. In 2004-05 the budget was \$407,000, of which we actually expended \$378,000. We are estimating the budget for 2005-06 at \$340,000. The cost of administering the Seniors Card is mainly taken up in staff salaries.

Mrs MENKENS: Fine. I refer to the 'Output Statement' on page 1-21 of the MPS. As a follow on from that, I note that employee expenses are quite high as a proportion of the total budget. Could you outline the employee numbers and positions held in the Seniors policy unit?

Mr PITT: We will take that one on notice if you do not mind.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you, Minister. I refer to page 1-18 of the MPS and the allocation of \$0.58 million for the provision of places in playgroups, recreational and day activities for children and young people being cared for by their grandparents. Minister, could you please advise how many actual places this funding will provide and where these places will be located?

Mr PITT: The department has allocated, as you said, \$1.08 million in 2005-06 to the Seniors portfolio, of which \$0.58 million is on a triennial basis for the provision of respite for grandparents caring for their grandchildren full time. One-off funds of \$0.5 million is to support further program development within the Seniors portfolio. I think we all understand the need for grandparents to have breaks from raising their grandchildren full time. It has been recognised not only at a state level but also at a national level by the community and disability services ministers council. A working group of the Community Services Ministers Advisory Council has been commissioned to develop a report into the range and extent of grandparent needs. The report is currently being considered by the community and disability services ministers council and has been endorsed by ministers from most jurisdictions, including Queensland. It is an issue that this government takes very seriously and is committed to addressing through the COAG process which seeks to develop a nationally coordinated approach to the issue.

At this stage I think the approximate number of places—and I must say that it is only an approximation; I do not have the exact figure for you—is around about 1,000. But we need to consult further with organisations representing seniors as to where they should be located. That will be done on the basis of need. I point out to the member and the committee as a whole that the department is currently drilling down a needs based analysis regarding all aspects of the portfolio, whether it be Communities or Disability Services, to ensure that any new initiatives go to areas of greatest need and that it is not a need identified by the press or a question in parliament or someone who likes to scream loudly. We are trying to get the data to ensure that placement of any outcomes of a new initiative is in such a fashion as to go, first of all, to the area of greatest need.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you. With reference to that same allocation and MPS page 1-8, yes, Minister, I certainly agree that that will be a welcome addition. However, are we to understand that this allocation of playgroup places is only a substitute instead of providing a much-needed carer payment for grandparents?

Mr PITT: I think the member would understand that payments for people—whether they be pensions or those sorts of things—fall within the ambit of the Commonwealth. If the Commonwealth was prepared to progress that, I am sure that all Queenslanders would welcome it. The state is not into that type of payment in general terms. However, I think what we are doing in respect of giving some support and relief for grandparents is a very positive initiative and something that is totally within the control of the state government to provide.

I point out that there was a question on notice from government members in relation to this estimates hearing. I will read one paragraph from my response which may assist you in this question. I have said in the response—

Initially, a variety of service delivery models will be trialled to determine which models provide the best outcomes for grandparents and children in their care. The models will be developed in consultation with grandparents and will be targeted towards a broad range of age groups, from young children to teenagers. Recent Australian reports, including the COTA National Seniors report Grandparents Raising Grandchildren, have informed the development of the Valuing Seniors strategy.

Mrs MENKENS: Thank you. I refer to page 1-19 of the MPS and the allocation of funding to seniors organisations for Seniors Week. Minister, could you please tell the committee how much funding is allocated on a recurrent basis to support seniors organisations? How many community organisations were funded last year, with the exception of the funding which was allocated each year to support seniors weeks outside of that?

Mr PITT: Fostering positive attitudes to ageing is a key role of the department, and this is achieved through hosting events and developing resources that promote positive attitudes to ageing. The annual celebration of Seniors Week in August aims to promote awareness of the contributions, the achievements and the ambitions of seniors. The event has been celebrated for 19 years in Queensland now. In 2004 Seniors Week was held from 14 to 22 August, and in 2005 it will be held from 20 to 28 August. These Seniors Week celebrations encourage cross-generational and inclusive activities for everyone to enjoy and share in the community. The Seniors Week theme was 'Ageing: Everybody's Doing It' and this theme will be applied again in 2005. I must say that one of the most successful programs we had last year was cross-generational in which young people took part. I think there is a natural affinity. There must be some sort of generation jump from the very young to the seniors in our society, because there was an exceptional affinity there.

Seniors Week 2005-06 has a budget allocation of \$140,000. This includes \$100,000 to assist seniors organisations to hold events. There is \$40,000 towards the employment of a part-time coordinator, as in previous years. More particularly, a total of 119 organisations have been funded for the 2005 Seniors Week funding round, and these events and activities that will be held throughout the state will include entertainment and multicultural events; health, fitness and sports activities; and intergenerational activities. You will be pleased to note that when the documentation came up for my signature to release the funds and to approve the organisations that were to receive funds I did put an annotation at the bottom of that document that I think \$100,000 is not enough. We need to do better next year.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer to page 1-20 of the MPS and I note that the percentage of Seniors Card holders against eligible persons is currently 81 per cent. Minister, what is the percentage of Seniors Card holders against eligible persons within the Indigenous community?

Mr PITT: Can I tell you that that is a very good question. We do not have the data on that. You will have noticed from a previous answer my interest in providing disability services on an equitable basis to our Indigenous citizens. The same thing applies regarding seniors. We do have some information that may be of some assistance here. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a target group who were estimated to receive one during 2004-05 was 1,500. I think we provided 1,550, and we anticipate this year to provide 1,650. But that does not really answer your question because—

Mrs MENKENS: No.

Mr PITT: We do not know the quantum, and that is something that we have to apply our minds to.

Mrs MENKENS: On a similar area, I refer to page 1-19 of the MPS and the department's proposal to investigate the requirement for the development of appropriate resources to address the mistreatment of older people in Indigenous communities. Minister, can you outline the preliminary work that has been done by your department on this issue to date and what resources have been allocated for the forthcoming year?

Mr PITT: As you would be aware, we have a program of prevention of elder abuse. I am committed to providing initiatives which will do this, irrespective of people's backgrounds. Of course, older people in Indigenous communities—as the member for Cook would understand—have a different set of family arrangements and caring arrangements within those communities and it is not always easy to apply programs that are suited to what we call mainstream or urban communities to the more remote communities.

Mr O'BRIEN: That is right.

Mr PITT: The development of resources to respond to this important issue will be investigated in conjunction with the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit's work, and that is ongoing. A funding allocation will be considered from the non-recurrent funds of \$500,000 for the Seniors program development.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to dot point 7, page 1-19, which refers to the recruitment of officers within the department's 10 regions. Minister, could you tell us the time line of those appointments and where they will be based?

Mr PITT: Recruitment has already started. I am going to refer this matter to the director-general. This is an initiative that has come about only in the last several months. It became quite apparent to me that our seniors' unit, which is based here in Brisbane, was a small unit and had done a magnificent job over the years. However, it was my view that we needed to be closer to our client base and it was important that in each of the 10 regions there was an officer whose job description meant that they would zero in on seniors' issues—not just collecting data, not just promoting government activities, but actually actively engaging seniors and also helping develop seniors networks.

At this stage a 0.5 position has been assigned to each of the 10 regions. That 0.5 position in most regions matches off against the 0.5 position that has been assigned to support for the disability councils. So we have an officer who has a 0.5 position dedicated to the disability councils. We are rolling that out as we go along.

I have always said to the director-general that identifying the right people is more important than urgently getting people in place and not ending up with the right person. As you would understand, when you are dealing with a sensitive clientele—and I can tell you seniors can be just as sensitive as people with a disability or anyone else—you have to get the right person and to get the person who can do both jobs is just that little bit harder indeed. Maybe the director-general might like to add some more to that.

Ms Apelt: I think the minister has already actually answered the question. Each of the regions does have an officer who has specific responsibilities in relation to seniors. Those officers are on a half-time basis. Their job is to link in with various community initiatives that seniors are involved in and also to work very closely with the Seniors Council. For some of those officers the recruitment has finished and they are finally appointed to their positions. Others are going through the recruitment process at the moment. In the meantime, all of the 10 regions has a dedicated person who focuses just on seniors.

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to page 1-19 of the MPS and the allocation of \$.5 million for the development of evidence based innovative services for seniors. Minister, could you please provide an outline of what these services are, where they are located and the funding for each project conducted last year?

Mr PITT: The department has allocated \$1.08 million in 2005-06 to the Seniors portfolio and 0.5 of that million is on a triennial basis for the provision of respite for grandparents. That is one of the initiatives. There is a one-off funding of \$5 million to support further program development within the Seniors portfolio. The department provides an integrated program of prevention and early intervention service to assist seniors to remain valued and active members of our community through funding of \$1.68 million. I just might break that down for you: there is \$970,000 provided for the Older People's Action Program and the Safe and Confident Living Program; \$220,000 for the seniors inquiry line—a free statewide one-stop information and referral service; \$96,533 for the Australian Pensioners and Superannuants League—that is a peak group for seniors; \$335,240 for the Elder Abuse Prevention Unit; and \$54,788 to the Australasian Centre for Ageing to develop the evidence base around seniors' issues. The remaining \$0.5 million non-recurrent funding in 2005-06 will be allocated for the development of best practice service delivery models to support seniors. We are in the process now of actually defining that and rolling that out. I guess it is one of those occasions in which I have to tell you to watch this space.

Mrs MENKENS: Minister, I refer again to page 1-19 and the Queensland Seniors Council. You refer to 'establish the Queensland Seniors Council'. Exactly what stage is that at?

Mr PITT: The Queensland Seniors Council was established following a review of advisory councils, including the previous Ministerial Advisory Council for Older Persons. The new Queensland Seniors Council is going to be very much like the disability council. It is a regionally representative council comprising an independent chair and 10 representatives from across the state, but in addition there will be one Aboriginal representative, one Torres Strait Islander representative and one ex-officio Queensland government representative. All members external to the government will be aged 50 years and over and selected to encompass a range of backgrounds and cultures. It is my intention that the council meet three times a year and provide current and timely advice to me and the government on issues that relate to the development of policies, programs and services that impact on seniors and ageing. A selection process for membership of the Queensland Seniors Council is currently under way and I hope to announce membership during Seniors Week—how appropriate—from 20 to 28 August and the council will hold its first meeting in September 2005. I have consulted my specialist who indicates that my treatment regime will allow me to attend that first council meeting and I am looking forward to that.

I would like to thank members of the second term of the Ministerial Advisory Council for Older Persons for their advice and dedication to seniors and ageing issues throughout the term. But I think that you have probably gathered by now my determination to make all of our councils that exist within my portfolio, or any committees, regionally representative. Part of the vision of the Communities portfolio is to make sure that people, wherever they live in Queensland, get as equal an opportunity as we can possibly give them in making decisions and getting the benefits of any support government may provide.

Mrs MENKENS: Just briefly, referring to a previous question which was to do with the 10 regions, exactly where are these 10 regions based?

Mr PITT: The 10 regions for?

Mrs MENKENS: I refer to dot point 7 page 1-19, 'recruit an officer within each of the department's 10 regions.'

Mr PITT: What I will do is provide you with a map. That makes it easy. Prior to that, listing from the north down: the best part of the state, far-north Queensland; followed by north Queensland, which is where both your and the member for Charters Towers reside; there is a separate region for Mackay-Whitsunday; a central Queensland-Fitzroy region; Wide Bay; Sunshine Coast; Gold Coast; Ipswich/West Moreton; Darling Downs-south-west; and, of course, a metropolitan region. So they are the 10 regions. What I am endeavouring to do is, where possible, have all the instruments of advice and support spread right across the 10 regions to ensure that, as I said before, we reach into every corner of the state and do our best to provide equitable service delivery.

CHAIR: That concludes the time for that block of non-government questions. I call the honourable member for Ferny Grove.

Mr WILSON: Page 1-18 of the MPS refers to a large mail-out of a seniors discount directory in conjunction with private sector companies. Can you please advise the benefits to Queensland seniors of these mail-outs?

Mr PITT: The Queensland government Seniors Card Scheme started in 1990. There are currently more than 8,000 business outlets offering discounts to seniors. Businesses in the discount scheme receive a free listing in their local discount directory and have the option to purchase display ads in one or more directories or direct mail advertising. Direct mail advertising to Queensland seniors began during 1997-98 during the term of the coalition government and is conducted by many other state governments. A mail-out to 50,000 cardholders was conducted by the Department of Communities in March on behalf of a registered Seniors Card discount provider, Australian Naturalcare Products. Australian Naturalcare Products is one of 8,000 business outlets registered with the Queensland Seniors Card program as a discount provider. Most participating businesses are based in Queensland. Businesses in the Seniors Card discount scheme, whether they are based in Queensland or interstate, are approved according to departmental policy. This policy includes confirming each business's trading credentials with the Office of Fair Trading or the relevant national or state regulatory body. In this instance the company concerned serves a national market, including Queenslanders.

When an approved business purchases direct mail advertising there is no cost to the Queensland government. Australian Naturalcare Products met the cost of all postage, envelopes and printing associated with this discount offer as well as paying the Department of Communities the registered fee for sole insert advertising to cardholders. The state government logo is included on each envelope to ensure any return mail is delivered to the Department of Communities thereby protecting the confidentiality of each cardholder's personal details. For privacy reasons the mail-out is provided under contract to a third party, mailed out and destroyed afterwards. The department does not guarantee or provide any specific endorsement of the goods and services themselves and a disclaimer is included in all mail-outs.

In spite of these safeguards, however, and due to a small number of complaints—and I must say it has only been a very small number of complaints; my view is that seniors love receiving mail—I have called for a full review of current practices relating to mail-outs. The protection of our senior consumers will always be the government's first priority in these circumstances.

CHAIR: In view of the time, the rest of the questions from government members and, I understand, non-government members will now be in relation to the Department of Communities area. If you could pass on our thanks to those of your departmental and ministerial staff involved in the area of Seniors.

Minister, I take you to page 1-1 of the MPS. I note it states that one of the strategic issues for the Department of Communities is to provide high-quality youth justice services and detention facilities. I would like to ask you what the department is doing to address offending by young people.

Mr PITT: Thank you very much, Mr Chairman, for your question. The government has put in place a number of programs that aim to ensure that young people are held accountable for their offending behaviour and that they do receive the appropriate intervention to stop further offending. Earlier this year we did hear the opposition talking about jailing young offenders. I do not really want to talk about making our community safer; that is not necessarily one and the same thing.

In Queensland judges and magistrates make sentencing decisions after careful consideration of all the facts presented to them. It is not appropriate for the government to dictate individual sentences. Courts have a range of options available under the Juvenile Justice Act from reprimands and fines through to supervised orders and detention for more serious offences. This government is putting in place programs that are helping to divert young people from offending or reoffending and the statistics show that we are on the right track. I think that is in keeping with the mantra of the portfolio in general: we are into prevention and early intervention as much as anything else.

The Children's Court annual report, tabled earlier this year, reported a drop in the number of charges laid against young people of 13.5 per cent. There has also been a drop in the average daily number of young people in detention and a 20 per cent drop in the number of young people on supervised community based orders. The programs put in place by the government are helping to achieve these positive results. For example, the Youth Justice Conferencing Program is a diversionary and restorative justice response to youth offending. Its effectiveness is well and truly demonstrated. There has been more than a 170 per cent increase from 2002-03 to 2003-04 in the number of youth justice conferences that have been held.

Significant work and an \$11.9 million funding allocation in 2005-06 has also been dedicated to the statewide expansion of Youth Justice Service Centres. This will help the government to deliver on our commitment to ensure that youth justice is responsive to community expectations and that programs are effective in reducing crime. We continue to improve our youth detention centre infrastructure and the provision of education and health services to deliver rehabilitation and reintegration programs that reflect best practice. I am very proud of the government's record in relation to youth justice and look forward to further questions on it.

Mr O'BRIEN: Can you elaborate on the role of the Youth Justice Conferencing Program and the role of the new service delivery centres, please?

Mr PITT: I thank the member for the question. I am sure that you have been as impressed as I have with our Youth Justice Conferencing Program. I have had the opportunity as minister to sit in on a mock-up of one of these, played out by brilliant actors from the Department of Communities. It was an eye-opener for me to see the way in which people positioned both the offenders and those who were offended against to achieve a result that meant that the young offender would actually fess up to what they had done, would understand the impact of what they had done and become contrite, as we would expect them, and, in many cases, offer up some way of reparation for the person they offended against.

I am referring in particular to the satisfaction that victims as well as offenders are reporting regarding this process. In the 2005-06 budget we have allowed for the successful youth justice program to be expanded across Queensland through a \$2.5 million funding boost. The \$2.5 million is part of a four-year \$10 million funding commitment to expand the youth justice conferencing program to build on its success.

The latest allocation will enable the program to meet increased demand following the statewide roll-out. These funds will help us to deliver more youth justice services to divert young people from the criminal justice system. Youth justice conferencing is a restorative justice approach to youth crime that provides police and courts with the option of bringing young offenders face to face with the victims of their crime.

The outcomes of a successful conference is an agreement about what must be done to repair the harm. Youth justice conferencing has been highly successful in Queensland and it forms a key part of the Beattie government's strategy to reduce offending and reoffending. In fact, the 2003-04 results show that 97 per cent of conferences result in agreements between the victims and the offenders and 98 per cent of conference participants, including the victims, have been satisfied with the agreements made.

Youth justice conferences are not a soft option. They are an effective way of making young offenders face up to and take responsibility for their offences and for victims to have their say about how the offence impacted on them. The state budget 2005-06 also includes \$14.4 million as part of a \$21.8 million allocation of equity funding over three years to establish new regional service delivery

centres for the Department of Communities. This includes a new youth justice service delivery model and acquiring new and refurbished youth justice service centres. The government is committed to implementing and supporting a range of initiatives and programs to reduce the risk of offending by young people and to build safer and more supportive communities.

Mr O'BRIEN: Page 1-1 of the MPS describes a continuation of the places of safety trial. Can you please provide an update about how the trial is progressing?

Mr PITT: Queensland, along with other states and territories, has taken the initiative in trialling responses to address the serious issue of volatile substance misuse, which is more popularly known as chroming. In 2003 the state government agreed to trial police powers to detain people affected by volatile substances and take them to a place of safety as part of a comprehensive response to this issue. The places of safety trial commenced in five sites which were set up between July and November last year in conjunction with a statewide trial of police powers. Those sites were determined after consultation with the federal government because it provided significant funds for this initiative.

These trials are in addition to the existing funding available to communities across Queensland for youth services, homelessness and youth crime prevention initiatives. The places of safety trial aims to provide young people who chrome with a safe place to recover when home or hospital is not an option and to link in with the support services they require. While some services have limited accommodation capacity, short-term accommodation placements are not the primary aim of the trial. Most of the services have criteria for entry, including an age limit. It should be remembered that this is only a trial—a very important trial at that.

The participating organisations were able to offer over 2,800 service contacts but could not meet every demand due in the main to age, behavioural issues and services being at full capacity. In this year's budget the government confirmed its commitment to responding to volatile substance misuse by allocating \$8.8 million over four years. In addition, the integrated response to homelessness and public intoxication includes an additional allocation of \$4.55 million over four years.

The CMC had already been engaged to evaluate the trial of police powers. In my mind, it made sense for them to also be asked to evaluate the places of safety trial. I expect to receive a final report at the end of the month. I will keep parliament and the Queensland community informed of our efforts to address this very serious issue—and a very serious issue it is. Although not reaching epidemic proportions, it is of great concern that young people should go down this path. I think we have a responsibility to divert them from the activity and when they do become involved in the activity understand that their safety is the first priority.

It may be offensive for people to see young people chroming. We may be negative in our comments regarding that practice, but I think we should also be compassionate and understanding that there are reasons young people do this. As a society we owe it to our next generation to try to break the nexus between whatever is driving them to chrome and the result, which is far more horrific than many of the legal or illegal drugs that they may attach themselves to.

Mr WILSON: Minister, earlier you touched on strengthening community organisations. By reference to the MPS at 1-2, can you identify the practical ways in which this strengthening non-government organisations initiative will benefit community organisations?

Mr PITT: Yes, I can. Last month the Premier and I announced at the QCOSS post budget breakfast that there was going to be \$24.3 million allocated over the next four years for a project aimed at strengthening the capacity of non-government organisations. I alluded to some of the benefits of this in the Disability Services part of the estimates.

Non-government organisations deliver a vast range of vital services and support to families and individuals. They are the backbone of many Queensland communities. I might add that there are a number of communities where people belong to a multiplicity of organisations. I sometimes wonder where these good souls find the time to do so much with limited hours in their lives.

The government provides a very significant amount of money to these organisations to provide services to Queenslanders. This is why the project is so important to us all. It will look at the way the non-government organisations and government do business together and with their clients. Our clients are some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. This project will help us deliver services more effectively and efficiently. More than 53 per cent of the Department of Communities' budget and 62 per cent of the Disability Services Queensland budget is invested in services that are delivered by non-government organisations.

NGOs are therefore the first point of contact for Queenslanders seeking support and assistance through programs managed by this portfolio. A well-functioning NGO sector is a vital component of the Communities and Disability Services system and critical to the overall wellbeing of communities. With this in mind the government is committed to a sustainable and efficient NGO sector, capable of delivering assessable and appropriate services well into the future.

Another goal we have is to improve the way the departments manage funding for community services and their business relationships with the NGO sector. I hasten to assure the non-government sector that this is not a case of government asking the non-government sector to do all the changing. I know we have to do better ourselves. I am sure as part of this process some of those issues will be identified. Together we will make changes that will be of benefit to everyone.

In July 2004 I asked the member for Toowoomba North, Kerry Shine, to lead the development of the Strengthening NGOs Strategy. I pay tribute to the great job he did. In 2005-06, \$9.3 million will be invested in a range of practical initiatives developed under this strategy that include small grants to achieve efficiencies, help with training, subsidies for software and some collocation of the services. I look forward to informing parliament and the Queensland community of progress and achievements from the government's unparalleled and practical commitment to a strong and effective non-government sector in Queensland.

Mr FENLON: Minister, page 1-1 of the MPS refers to promoting the wellbeing and safety of communities. What is a recent practical example of this?

Mr PITT: As was widely reported, torrential rain led to severe flooding on the Gold Coast on 29 and 30 June. There were tragic circumstances, including a loss of life. I think we all remember the day or two that we waited for the outcome for the young couple who were swept off the causeway.

The Department of Communities has been actively involved in community recovery responses. I am very proud of the efforts of staff from my department. A 1800 line was established from Friday, 1 July. Field staff have responded to all calls for assistance and more than 200 residents have been helped. In all, \$30,000 has been paid in emergent relief.

I wrote to the member for Currumbin on Monday this week in response to claims that she made publicly about a lack of assistance, which quite frankly were wide of the mark. For the benefit of the committee, I seek leave to table that letter.

Leave granted.

Mr PITT: Most of the residents affected by the flooding on the Gold Coast were from the Miami Caravan Park which was severely impacted by the event. I, along with the director-general, took time out on Sunday to visit the caravan park. I was very impressed with the assistance being provided. More than 70 people from the park have been displaced by flooding. The Department of Communities is providing temporary accommodation and meals for these people while the clean-up of the park is undertaken.

In addition, other government and community agencies are providing ongoing services to residents such as alternative housing advice, assistance with health issues, individual counselling and legal advice. The provision of these services is coordinated through the Department of Communities.

It is expected that the critical phase of the recovery response will be completed in the next two weeks, enabling many people to return to their homes. Recovery costs for this event, which are shared jointly between the Commonwealth and state through the natural disaster relief agreement, are expected to total close to \$1 million.

During my visit to the park I had the opportunity to see the Red Cross and other service organisations in action. It was heartening to see the way non-government and government organisations were working together in a seamless and coordinated fashion. I took the time out to speak to a number of residents. It is really good to sometimes get feedback about the performance of your departmental officers in circumstances like this. They could never have prepped these people the way the comments came out. People were effusive in their praise of the response from the Department of Communities.

I sometimes think that this department does good work in areas that go unnoticed. As minister, I am very proud of the work that they did on the Gold Coast. I believe that we replicate that in times of disaster right across the state.

CHAIR: We might go back to another block of non-government questions at this time.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to page 1-23 of MPS under the output youth policy and services and funding allocated for youth crime prevention initiatives. Can you provide the committee with a regional breakdown of youth crime and graffiti prevention initiatives, including the amount of state government funding allocated per annum?

Mr PITT: The Queensland crime prevention strategy Building Safer Communities is an essential part of creating safer and more supportive communities and fostering the development of community networks. Central to this strategy is a principle of strengthening the ability of communities to plan and develop their own responses in local areas.

In 2004-05, one-off funding totalling \$360,000 was allocated to 20 organisations for youth crime prevention projects to reduce or prevent young people's involvement in crime and increase the capacity of communities to respond to youth crime in local areas. In 2005-06, \$360,000 of one-off funds will be

again available for youth crime prevention. These projects engage young people in addressing factors that contribute to their offending and provide them with opportunities to achieve their full potential through participating in family and community life.

The projects aim to divert young people from the youth justice system and reduce the number of Indigenous young people in custody. One-off funding of \$225,000 will be available in 2005 for regional youth crime prevention projects in far-north Queensland where you would understand that with a high percentage of Indigenous young people in the area there is a corresponding unfortunately high instance of youth offending, an issue which we will try to address.

The funding round for 2004-05 closed on 4 April. This is for graffiti solutions. A total of 25 submissions from across the state were received and priority was given to projects requesting up to \$10,000. The department has recommended \$100,000 in funding in 13 metropolitan regional locations to implement projects that reduce or prevent the impact of graffiti on communities.

You talk about how much each of the regions get. That is one of the things I am determined not to do. Every child wins a prize. Every region gets their one-tenth of what the budget may be. The whole idea of needs based planning is to identify the problem, identify the depth of the problem and apply appropriate funding and resources to meet those problems. It is not possible to meet every problem situation right across the state. I think as the minister I have a responsibility to come to grips with the areas where people are most at the risk.

Mr KNUTH: Page 1-22 of the MPS refers to youth policy and services. I would just like to raise the issue earlier this year when over 220 offences were committed in Charters Towers in a three-month period. Some 66 offenders were charged. They were interviewed by a number of youth workers. Quite a few of these offenders had indicated that they looked forward to getting into places like the Cleveland detention centre which they call 'Camp Cleveland'.

This is more or less a passage of entry to these places. I think that this is a serious issue. When we can see that we have young kids out there committing serious crime so that they can get into detention centres, what measures are in place to ensure that young people in detention take responsibility for their actions and are made aware of the terrible impacts of their crimes?

Mr PITT: Yes. It is a very good question. Could I just refer you to a document that is on the lips of every Queenslander? It is called springborg.com. In that document, the author says—

We believe our jails...

For that, I will substitute 'detention centres'—

... should be places where people are given the opportunity to rehabilitate and learn new skills so they can contribute positively to the community when they are released.

I would think that, sometimes, people misinterpret the programs that are being offered in these centres, which are restorative in their nature, in an attempt to have people return to their communities as better citizens, better equipped to overcome whatever environmental and social issues may have resulted in their going there in the first place.

We have moved a long way from the stocks, the hulks in the Thames, the whippings and the stonings that were believed to change people's attitudes in the past. Remember, here, that we are dealing with young people. The Cleveland Youth Detention Centre, like the Brisbane Youth Detention Centre, does an excellent job. We are doing something that happens right across the adult system as well. We are taking away people's freedom. That is the way in which a civilised society begins to actually get its pound of flesh, so to speak, from those who transgress its rules.

But then we are faced with a problem. If you actually have retributive justice as the sole means and all you do is to lock people up and throw away the key, what you have coming out of facilities like that are people who are embittered; who have learnt nothing; who, as a matter of fact, have probably learnt nothing positive, but may have learnt some of the negatives that others can teach them whilst they are inside; and who then come back out into the community and pose an even greater threat than they did when they went in in the first place. What, I think, we try to do, and the evidence across the world supports this, is outfit people better to come back into society and give them the skills which, sometimes, they did not have when they went in, so that they can make a worthwhile contribution to the community in which they live. So I really do take offence to anyone calling our detention centres holiday camps.

I am aware that in some Indigenous communities in Cape York there is a rite of passage concept. I think that is something about which, in many of our urban areas, there is a bit of an urban myth. Having spent 71 days in an institution myself, I tell you what, the worst thing that I felt was having my freedom of movement and being able to make decisions about what I would do next taken away from me. That is a pretty severe punishment. Of course, these young people who go into detention centres have that taken away from them. If they are saying these things about looking forward to going to the youth detention centre, it is one of two things. Either they are misinformed, or where they are coming from is a pretty horrible place.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to page 1-24 of the MPS and Schoolies Week Partnership. What is the total amount of funding allocated to support the Schoolies celebration both on the Gold Coast and across Queensland, and how is it forecast that this money will be spent?

Mr PITT: Schoolies Week around Australia is a celebration by young people at the end of their year 12 studies, which marks the end of their school life. For the member's benefit, I finished my secondary schooling in Charters Towers, and we all took off to the Anabranche afterwards for, I dare say, a burger and a few beers. That was the extent of our Schoolies. Since Schoolies Week on the Gold Coast began about 30 years ago, the event has grown significantly. More than 50,000 young people from all over Australia now gather at Surfers Paradise in late November and early December each year.

In November 2002, the Premier announced a review of the arrangements regarding Schoolies Week on the Gold Coast in response to serious public safety concerns during the event that year. An MPs' task force identified key concerns from the 96 public submissions and developed a number of recommendations. In May 2003, and based on these recommendations, the Premier announced a three-point plan that would guide the event for 2003-04. The plan focused on better coordination through partnerships, improved safety and increased awareness of rights and responsibilities.

The state government is rightfully proud of the success of its involvement in the coordination and management of the last two Gold Coast Schoolies Week events. The government has made a clear commitment to continue with a highly visible police and liquor licensing presence and dedicated ambulance and emergency services. In 2004-05, the budget for that was \$0.98 million. The expenditure in 2004-05 was \$0.98 million. This year, we have allocated in the budget \$0.798 million. You would be aware that we have been in negotiations with the Gold Coast City Council about transitioning the coordination of the event to the locals. Those negotiations are ongoing. Members of the committee can be assured of the government's commitment to providing essential services such as police, health services, emergency services, the QAS, liquor licensing, the Office of Fair Trading checking on the accommodation situation and making sure that young people are not being ripped off and an education program that goes into all our schools in the catchment area for Gold Coast Schoolies.

As a matter of fact, we have arrangements with the education departments of New South Wales and Victoria to provide them with information prior to Schoolies so that young people there are aware of what to expect. You would also be aware that there are almost two Schoolies. There is our Schoolies and the influx of southern students to follow that. But from all reports that I received after last year's Schoolies event, we had a far safer Schoolies even than in the year before, which was very much superior to the problems that had occurred in the past. I am very confident that the plan that is going on now is up to speed and that we will reach some agreement with the Gold Coast City Council on the future of this event, incorporating local input.

Mr KNUTH: Good answer, Minister. I refer to the Blueprint for the Bush mentioned on pages eight and 10 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. How many staff from your department are working on the blueprint, how much funding was allocated to develop the Blueprint for the Bush in 2004-05, how much funding has been allocated for 2005-06, and, most importantly, can you also provide a breakdown of how this funding will be used?

Mr PITT: I am going to ask the director-general to address the staffing issue but, on the budget, during 2004-05 there was no budget because all there had been was an announcement. The actual work had not begun. For 2005-06 the budget is \$660,000. The Blueprint for the Bush project really is a unique opportunity for us to have a partnership between the Queensland government and AgForce to deliver on a 10-year Smart State plan with strategies and outcomes aimed at supporting sustainable rural and regional Queensland communities.

I think the member would know as well as I do that there has been a population drain from communities west of the Great Divide. Much of this is beyond the control of anyone, particularly in the mining communities—when the minerals run out, no one stays. I remember as a young lad going to Mary Kathleen near Mt Isa and playing football there. It was a buzzing community. If you go to Mary K now everything is gone. All you have got is the pads where things were.

The Blueprint for the Bush will be a 10-year Smart State plan, as I said. The aim is to support rural and regional communities to manage change and maximise their self-reliance and sustainable potential, and to provide long-term strategic direction for Queensland government decision-making in relation to rural communities. I might ask the director-general to elaborate on the staffing arrangements and, if time permits, I would love to talk more about the Blueprint for the Bush.

Ms Apelt: At this point in time, there is the equivalent of 14 full-time estimate staff dedicated to Blueprint for the Bush. However, we anticipate that as the rollout of the blueprint goes through different stages the staff might increase from time to time, depending upon the demand. At this point in time, we have a senior officer who is the director of the project and another senior officer who is in charge of the engagement strategy out and about across the regions. We have six officers located in regional areas whose job it is to make sure that they consult and listen to people on the ground through the different

regional areas. We have a resource in charge of marketing and communication. There are three research officers and one administrative assistant. We have seconded one officer to work with AgForce—to liaise between AgForce and the state government.

Mr PITT: On the Blueprint for the Bush, there are a broad range of industry and community interests that have been engaged in the development of the blueprint. AgForce, of course, is a key player. It has established a reference group which includes the Local Government Association of Queensland, the Queensland Farmers Federation, the Queensland Council of Social Services, Tourism Queensland and organisations representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, environmental issues and other industries. So we really are going as broad as we can, because it is all about livability and sustainability in the bush. It is not just about a couple of gimmick headline icon projects.

Mr Chairman, if you would bear with me for a moment, I would like to make a correction to a previous answer I supplied to the member for Burdekin in relation to evidence based innovation services. I believe I said \$5 million non-recurrent and it really is \$0.5 million non-recurrent. A little bit of difference there, isn't there?

CHAIR: The member for Charters Towers, do you have another one?

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I am very interested, actually, in the Blueprint for the Bush and I refer to the Blueprint for the Bush mentioned on pages eight to 10 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statements. Can you also provide a breakdown of how this funding will be used? That is, for 2004-05 and for 2005-06.

Mr PITT: I indicated earlier that there was no allocation in 2004-05. The allocation is for 2005-06 of \$660,000. I might ask the director-general to give you some more information. These are broad allocations. Please do not hold us to the last dollar and cent, because this is a dynamic piece of work. No doubt, there will adjustments made along the way as the process rolls out. The director-general may be able to give you some indication of the allocations.

Ms Apelt: The final details of the budget for Blueprint for the Bush are still being developed, given that it is a relatively recent initiative. However, the key items of expenditure will include the cost of consulting with bodies of people right across Queensland—that is, the overall cost of the community engagement strategy. That will involve a range of workshops, listening tours and opportunities for people to be involved in various engagement initiatives. A symposium is planned to be held at the end of September at the University of Central Queensland. That will be a significant part of the budget, giving people an opportunity to share good practice and good ideas about initiatives that can lead to sustainable outcomes for the bush. In addition to that, there are a number of other communication opportunities that have been set up for people right across Queensland to feed in their ideas and feedback for Blueprint for the Bush. This includes a 1800 line and a number of opportunities via the web. Then, of course, there will be the cost of production of materials and distribution of draft blueprints to give people a final say.

Mr KNUTH: Minister, I refer to non-government question on notice No.8. I note that two licensed child care services have been closed in the last 12 months as a result of complaints. Can you provide an outline of those complaints and what action was taken against the licensees in those two instances?

Mr PITT: Section 167 of the Child Care Act 2002 precludes me from providing information specifically about an individual service provider, but I am quite happy to talk generally about the process of licensing and monitoring child care services. The introduction of the Child Care Act 2002 and the Child Care Regulation 2003 in September 2003 has strengthened the key role of the department in licensing and monitoring of child care services to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children using child care services across the state. Departmental policies and procedures and standard letters support the range of enforcement options that are included in the legislation and departmental policy requires officers, wherever possible, to work with licensees to negotiate resolution of concerns identified or raised with the department.

I think it is important that we do that. We are not a policing department. Although we are a regulating department and a monitoring department, I think our prime responsibility is to make things work and to work with people to make things work. Where this is not possible, however, or the licensee is unwilling, the act provides a range of compliance enforcement mechanisms ranging from the issuing of compliance notices to the power to urgently suspend a licence to operate a child-care centre. Queensland has continued to experience high growth in the number of child-care services being established across the state. This has made the task of licensing and monitoring compliance with the legislation more important and, may I say, more difficult because, as you would all be aware, child-care centres are popping up all over the place in response to demand.

The department has committed significant resources to ensure that staff responsible for licensing and monitoring services are adequately resourced and supported to ensure consistency in practice and quality outcomes for Queensland children. There are 50 full-time equivalent community support officers servicing Queensland for this. The most pressing matter for the department is to ensure compliance with legislative requirements and consistency in licensing and monitoring of child-care services. In 2004-05, 726 complaints were received against 454 licensed child-care services. Departmental staff in the

regional offices followed up those complaints. Action was taken depending upon the seriousness of the complaint. Two services have been closed in the last 12 months due to complaints. The enforcement provisions of the Child Care Act 2002 allow for opportunities for licensees to address matters of noncompliance before a decision to close the service is made. In 2004-05, six licensees were reported for allegations of harm to children in a child-care service. We followed those allegations up as well. I think you can see that we are doing our best to ensure compliance with the regulations.

The department also has a Ministerial Portfolio Statement measure that all complaints relating to serious safety breaches of licensed child-care services are responded to within two working days. As I said before, I believe that we are, if not on top of these issues, then certainly making a fair fist of coming to grips with them.

CHAIR: That is the end of that block of non-government questions. I believe that the honourable member for Ferny Grove has an issue that he would like to take up with you.

Mr WILSON: Minister, page 1-6 of the MPS refers to prevention and early intervention. Would you kindly elaborate on the measures the department is undertaking in this area?

Mr PITT: I keep repeating this because it is firmly embedded in my mind as to where I want this portfolio to go. The Queensland government as a whole is committed to the same objective: we are committed to working with families and communities to help them to avert crisis, to avert violence and harm and to prevent the entry of children and young people into the child protection system. More than this, we are committed to assisting people to build their strengths and their resilience and improve their health, wellbeing and future life chances. I cannot stress that too highly. The best defence against some of these issues is building stronger families and building strongly communities.

Currently, \$71.53 million, that is 54 per cent of the department's budget, is committed to the non-government sector to areas such as family support, domestic and family violence, child-care services and community support. As everyone appreciates, it is better to prevent harm or intervene early to stop it getting worse. This is why this significant sum is allocated each year specifically for the prevention and early intervention services. The Crime and Misconduct Commission of inquiry into foster care emphasised the critical need for a balanced approach to vulnerable children and their families and specifically recommended that the Department of Communities have responsibility for prevention and early intervention services. On more than one occasion when on the same platform as the Hon. Mike Reynolds, who is the Minister for Child Safety, I have indicated that it is my job to do him out of a job. I would like to think I could be successful, but we all know that in this world we will never get that noble aim achieved.

My department has been charged with the responsibility of engaging in early intervention and prevention programs that over time will reduce the number of young people who come into the care of the state. I do not expect that to happen overnight. I think we are experiencing in that particular sector a high number of notifications in response to the fact that people now really want to speak out and get this off their chest and get this issue resolved. I know it is causing some angst for the Minister for Child Safety in trying to meet the demands that that places upon him, but I have assured him that this department will, over a period of time, do its very best to ensure that fewer and fewer young people require to go that far. It may be that there will be mechanisms we can put in place where, through early intervention and prevention, we can positively impact on people's situations so that notification is not necessary. A diversion into some form of support or program as an intermediate step is a better option than waiting for everyone to hit the wall and require some judicial order to resolve the issue in favour of the child concerned.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-1 of the MPS mentions a further significant investment by the Queensland government in providing services to address homelessness, which is, of course, very welcome indeed. Could you inform the committee of the federal government's investment in this area?

Mr PITT: I must say that few issues have made my blood boil the way the federal government has treated the whole SAAP—Supported Accommodation Assistance Program—funding. It is almost as though people who are homeless are being blamed for being homeless, as though it is someone's fault for being homeless. There are very few people in this society who would choose to be homeless. There may be some to whom it has become a lifestyle, but I would venture to say that it would be a very small percentage of those people out there who are homeless. It is with regret that I outline to the committee the contrast between the Queensland government's efforts to address homelessness and the lack of effort on the part of the Commonwealth government.

The recent budget announcements have resulted in a significant boost in the Queensland government's funding for homelessness. This package amounts to \$235.52 million extra over the next four years. A total of \$56.45 million will be provided over four years through the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program—SAAP—for a comprehensive range of new initiatives with significant investment in homelessness in areas that are coming under increasing pressure, including Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Townsville, Mount Isa and Cairns. Additional supported accommodation services will be provided for homeless people with complex needs, families and young people in these locations, as well as the Sunshine Coast and the new Lady Bowen Centre at Spring Hill. Mount Isa will

also receive more supported accommodation targeting Indigenous women and children. Early intervention and outreach services will be established in 11 locations across Queensland to assist vulnerable people who are at risk of becoming homeless.

As members are no doubt aware, SAAP is a joint Commonwealth-state funding program that provides crisis accommodation to the homeless. The fourth SAAP agreement was to expire on 30 June 2005, but this has been extended to 30 September to allow negotiations to continue. We refuse to accept the paltry offer from the Commonwealth. We have dug our heels in and we are going to provide counterproposals. What degree of success we will have I do not know, but I think we owe it to the homeless of Queensland to look for a better deal from the Commonwealth.

The Howard government has not offered one extra cent in funding in the SAAP 5 agreement and it has refused to address the historic underfunding of Queensland. Despite having almost 25 per cent of the nation's homeless population and 19 per cent of the overall population, Queensland has only received 16 per cent of federal funding in the SAAP. To make matters even worse, the Commonwealth's offer for SAAP 5 has been designed to withdraw moneys from the existing services in Queensland. Moneys will be siphoned off from Queensland and other states to go to New South Wales. Whatever the results of the negotiations with the federal government, the recent state budget included a significant boost in Queensland government funding for homelessness, and this takes our proportional share relative to the Commonwealth from 40 per cent of all the funding to 55 per cent. To think we are not doing our fair share! I think we are proving by our actions that we are certainly standing up to the mark.

CHAIR: Minister, pages 1-14 and 1-15 of the MPS refer to school-age care services. Can you advise what assistance the Department of Communities is providing to these services to ensure that they meet the legislative requirements?

Mr PITT: The Queensland government is committed to ensuring families get the support they need to participate in employment, education and community life by ensuring that the child-care services they use are safe, suitable and provide the best care for their children. This includes school-age children. School-age care services provide a safe environment to more than 50,000 Queensland children. The government takes seriously the responsibility of ensuring that school-age children are given positive opportunities to grow and to learn in safe and supportive care environments. This includes ensuring services adhere to the principles of the Child Care Act 2002 and, in particular, the provision of safe and suitable care in the best interests of those children.

Under the Child Care Act 2002 and the Child Care Regulation 2003, school-age care services are required for the first time to hold a licence. School-age care services that existed prior to the implementation of this legislation have until 31 August this year to apply for a licence. Licensing will further enhance the safety of children attending school-age care services and will bring these services in line with minimum standards. A school-age care licensing action plan with a number of strategies to support the sector through the licensing process has been implemented through the office for children. The plan included an equipment grant for services that applied for a licence by 6 June 2005, an advertising campaign targeted at families in the community and the establishment of a hotline for regional staff.

The government is committed to ensuring existing services receive support throughout the process to retain staff, to manage their workloads, to upgrade facilities and to maintain operation. By 2008 services will need to comply with the staff qualifications and physical facility standards contained in the legislation, and the Queensland government will assist them to do this. The Department of Communities has already made a significant financial commitment to assist school-age care services to meet the legislative standards, and funds will continue to be allocated for this purpose right up to 2008. The department will continue to work with service providers to ensure their compliance with the legislation which provides for flexibility and innovation whilst maintaining quality standards. It is a very important part of the work we do.

We are all aware of the number of children who, due to the fact that both of their parents are working to make ends meet in this modern society of ours, find themselves in the position where after school the choices are that they become a latchkey child, with the attendant dangers to that; they are let loose into the community and left to their own devices, perhaps at the mercy of others; or some safe and secure environment is provided through after school hours care. We as a government have made a significant investment in after school hours care not only by way of funding and support but also by way of providing a regulatory framework that will ensure that children who are in that form of care are safe and engaged in challenging and meaningful activities.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, I refer to page 1-10 of the MPS. Can you explain the reasoning behind allocating three-quarters of a million dollars to services aimed at reducing the likelihood of further domestic and family violence?

Mr PITT: Currently the government provides almost \$27 million to support people affected by domestic and family violence. That includes services for those who perpetrated violence. I am going to return to that theme in a moment. This is in recognition of the fact that domestic and family violence affects too many lives and communities across Queensland. The Queensland government takes very

seriously its responsibility in reducing domestic and family violence. To this end I am pleased to inform you that the Queensland government has allocated an extra \$750,000 in the 2005-06 budget, increasing to \$1 million a year over the following three years, for more programs aimed at perpetrators of domestic and family violence.

I do not think any of us would deny the fact that the majority of perpetrators in these circumstances are males. I know a couple of times in the last month or so I have had a few letters to the editor that have got under my ribs with regard to accusing males of being the perpetrators, but I think the evidence is there. The percentage of males involved in such cases is in the high 90s. In the past much of what we have done has been designed to pick up the pieces of broken relationships and the after-effects of that and to provide safety and security for the female partner and children of the relationship. That has to continue. We do not resile from that: that must continue. But, again, it goes back to what I was saying before: if that is all we do then we are just waiting for more crisis situations to bank up behind us—we are looking at the results rather than the causes. There are a number of programs across the state that will be funded under this initiative that will try to intervene with the family, particularly with the male perpetrator, early in the breakdown of the relationship to assist them to work their way through those issues as a family. It should be the aim of the state in everything we do to keep families together wherever possible, because a family environment is still the best framework in which to rear children.

The extra funding is over and above the 11 services for perpetrators that are already funded to address the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours that sustain violence. Early intervention after the first instance of violence or abuse can have a significant impact in achieving behavioural change and preventing further instance of violence or abuse in relationships. It is also very important that programs for perpetrators with domestic and family violence are run in conjunction with support services for those affected, and all funded perpetrator services hold the safety of the victim as the highest priority and place responsibility for the violence on the perpetrator.

The new funding will allow non-government organisations to provide additional services and make programs available to more areas of Queensland. The funding will be used to provide a new program consisting of counselling and FaCS services, with three full-time staff in far-north Queensland and programs currently funded in the Moreton, Gold Coast, Darling Downs and north Queensland region. They will all receive a boost.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, I want to return to the theme of questioning that was being pursued by the member for Charters Towers in regard to the Blueprint for the Bush. You mentioned some of the institutions that are involved as part of the consultation, but can you please advise how the people of Queensland will be consulted in the development of the plan?

Mr PITT: I think consultation in this situation is very important. I come from regional Queensland, and at times I sometimes think we have been consulted to death over certain issues. The Premier has asked my department to take a lead role in conjunction with AgForce regarding this issue. You have my assurance that the consultation process here will both be broad, in-depth and it will be of such a nature that we will draw from it worthwhile data and worthwhile ways in which we can progress issues that come out of the blueprint.

The Premier and Peter Kenny, the President of AgForce Queensland, launched the discussion paper and signed an MOU for the Blueprint for the Bush at the historic Mount Abundance Homestead in Roma on 6 July. The purpose of the discussion paper was to get as much input as possible from Queenslanders. We want to stimulate discussion among Queenslanders to address the issues and challenges confronting bush communities over the life of the Blueprint for the Bush.

The consultation period closes on 14 October and, given the interest in the initiative, we will allow this extra time for feedback, pushing back the initial close-off date of 26 August. Contributions can be made via online, post, fax or email or by contacting my department and AgForce. I would encourage all those who have an interest in having a say on this matter to take the opportunity to make their voice heard.

The first phase of issues identification occurred between March and June 2005. That included two ministerial regional community forums at Barcaldine on 11 April and then again at Mitchell on 20 June. An AgForce blueprint tour, which visited 22 locations across the state during May and June 2005, and a third ministerial regional community forum will occur in October in western Queensland, also themed around the blueprint. Extensive consultation on the discussion paper and brochure I am sure will ensue and we will provide a symposium sometime later this year to provide contemporary expert advice on issues. We will bring people in who have some experience on these issues across Australia and have them address the major stakeholders in an effort to have the latest and most up-to-date information possible.

We will also be providing access to electronic feedback via ConsultQld, a 1800 referral service through Smart Service Queensland, which is part of my department, and an email/fax service. Of course, we have the AgForce reference group moving through Queensland talking to and with people all the time. Mr Kenny and I have already met, and we intend to meet on a regular basis over the next six to

eight months, leading hopefully to a draft response being tabled some time in February next year. Then I intend to go out once more throughout regional Queensland to ensure that we have it right or we get feedback from people as to whether or not they think we have it right. So I hope that the committee fully appreciates the fact that this is not, as some people have said, a gimmick. We are deadly serious about this. We want to use this unique opportunity that AgForce's brave stand has supplied us for the betterment of regional Queensland.

Mr WILSON: Page 1-7 of the MPS states that \$0.16 million has been allocated to the Esther Centre and \$0.9 million to the Forde Foundation. Can you detail how these funds are assisting former residents?

Mr PITT: The Forde Foundation and its unique grants program continue to provide practical and much-needed assistance to the former child residents of Queensland institutions. I think we will be forever stained as a society by the events in both state-run and church-run institutions in respect of abuse and neglect of young people over a long period of time. It is almost one of those taboos that no-one wanted to talk about but, fortunately, everything has been brought to the surface. Because of that, there is an opportunity for us as a society to, if not make amends, at least try to put something right to assist people to move on in their lives and to obtain for themselves a future that is going to give them some security and some satisfaction.

Since its establishment in August 2000, the foundation has cemented its place as a valuable element of the community based service system funded by the government to assist former residents rebuild their lives. Operating as an independent charitable trust, the foundation has held eight grant rounds and has approved the distribution of more than \$895,000 in funds to beneficiaries to assist with education and training programs, dental and medical care, medications, family reunions, computers and household items.

Under the careful guidance of Ms Leneen Forde, a former governor of Queensland, the foundation has approved more than 1,500 grants and has overseen the successful development of its twice-yearly grants program. Earlier this year the government approved the allocation of a further \$900,000 in supplementary funding to assist the foundation respond to its increasing number of allocations. This funding allocation builds on the government's previous \$2 million contribution and recognises the unique and valuable role of the foundation.

To date, the government is the largest single contributor to the foundation, with a total of a \$2.9 million contribution. The foundation's secretariat is colocated at South Brisbane with the Esther Centre—one of the key community based services established by the government to support former residents. The colocation of the foundation and the Esther Centre has successfully helped to ensure the delivery of coordinated services to former residents who access both organisations.

The Esther Centre, auspiced by Micah Projects Inc., provides individual advocacy, crisis support and counselling services to former residents. I am pleased to announce that recently I approved funds to have the Esther Centre and its relationship with the Forde Foundation relocated to far more suitable premises that not only have a better location but also more adequately suit the needs of the client base there. I meet regularly on a monthly basis with representatives of the Historical Abuse Network, and together we are trying to ascertain how the government can further assist them to rebuild their lives and move forward.

CHAIR: We will have five more minutes of non-government questions and maybe one more question from this side of the table and that will be it for the afternoon.

Mr KNUTH: I refer to page 1-11 of the MPS and the department's collaboration with Gambling Help. Minister, what is the total amount of funding dedicated to assisting problem gamblers?

Mr PITT: I guess I am a problem gambler. I really hit the road on Melbourne Cup Day; I buy far too many sweep tickets. But that is almost the sum total of my gambling, although from time to time I do not mind giving the pokies a bit of a work-out. Unfortunately, in our society some people cannot stop at that. In many ways it is an addiction. If we as a government and a society are going to rely upon the gambling dollar as a means of income for government to do its good work, there is also a responsibility for us to assist those who cannot handle the temptations that gambling provides.

The Department of Communities is currently undertaking a review of the performance of the Gambling Help services funded by this department. These include 13 regional Gambling Help services, the Gambling Help Line and the Gambling Help network. The results and recommendations from this review will feed into a larger evaluation being conducted by Queensland Treasury into the overall effectiveness of the broader service system in assisting people negatively affected by gambling.

The funded Gambling Help services collect client assessment data and service activity data which they then provide to the Department of Communities for performance management. The collection of this data also provides opportunities for better planning by the Gambling Help services to ensure improved outcomes for people experiencing difficulties with gambling. As part of this department's review, the Gambling Help data collection system is being assessed with the aim of implementing an upgraded system and services as part of the renegotiation of the next service

agreement. Current service agreements have been extended until June 2006 pending the outcome of Queensland Treasury's evaluation. In 2004-05 the gambling initiative funding from Treasury was \$3.633 million and in 2005-06 the estimate we have again for the gambling initiative funding from Treasury is \$3.633 million—so an equivalent amount.

Mr KNUTH: I have to admit that I have been to about 30 race meetings in the last three years, and I placed my first bet and I lost. However, I won it back in a tug of war competition. I refer to the recent achievements on page 1-6 of the MPS and the establishment of additional Indigenous positions. Minister, have many additional Indigenous people been employed by the department? What types of roles were created and where were they located?

Mr PITT: I am going to pass this to the director-general because it is a staffing issue, but I just want to place on record the view I have regarding employment of Indigenous personnel. It is my intention to ensure that we do meet and exceed the state expectations for Indigenous employment in both Disability Services and Communities. As a matter of fact, we exceed in Communities the number of Indigenous employees we have. In Disability Services we are a little short on that, but, as you can see, the fact that we are going to engage more Indigenous people regarding disability issues I am sure will bring forward the opportunity for us to employ more Indigenous personnel to help us deliver those services.

The other thing I would like to point out to the committee is that I have been involved all my life with Indigenous people and I do not for one moment subscribe to the view that people should be promoted beyond their skills capacity. I think that is an insult to people and any program that is put in place where you set aside positions and you accept people just moving up through the system because they happen to be Indigenous is an insult to the individuals concerned and a destabilising influence in the work force.

Bearing that in mind, discussions I have had with the director-general regarding employment of staff for specified positions has centred around the concept that people would be employed by my department first and foremost on their capacity to deliver services and their capabilities. The fact that decisions may be set aside for Indigenous personnel would be an absolute bonus for us. I also believe that we should be employing people in meaningful positions and positions of authority and positions of policy making rather than cluttering the system up with people in front office arrangements or in administrative tasks that anyone can do.

Ms Apelt: As at 30 June 2005, five per cent of employees within the Department of Communities identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. As the minister has indicated, this surpasses the Queensland public sector target of 2.4 per cent. The department has also recently undertaken recruitment and selection processes for nine new permanent positions including regionally based specified positions. These nine positions will be made up of one strategic policy officer, two officers who will be working in the community funding area, one officer who will be working in community engagement, and across the five regions there will be an officer allocated to the far-north Queensland region, northern Queensland, Rockhampton, the Moreton region and also Toowoomba.

CHAIR: That is the last of the non-government questions. I think there is one last question from the member for Greenslopes.

Mr FENLON: Minister, page 1-21 of the MPS refers to Smart Service Queensland in particular and refers to whole-of-government services delivery. Can you outline the achievements of SSQ and its benefits in delivering services to residents of Queensland?

Mr PITT: I believe Smart Service Queensland over the last 12 months has been one of the great success stories of the department, and I thank very much the officers concerned who have worked very hard on Smart Service Queensland to significantly enhance its capacity to deliver IT related responses to the needs of Queenslanders.

The initiative aims to provide Queenslanders with choices in how they transact with the government irrespective of where they live. People will be able to access transaction information services through a greater variety of options including the telephone, over the counter, internet, fax and mail. Online services will be available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Smart Service Queensland was established in February 2002. At that time it had five services available plus information services. As of today there are 43 services from 13 agencies being delivered through Smart Service Queensland plus information referrals for 24 agencies. Examples of services that are integrated with SSQ include business names, registering of encumbered vehicles and boats, written-off vehicles, business licence inquiries, seniors cards and event organiser information. The government has endorsed a strategy to migrate more than 400 government services to Smart Service Queensland over the next five years.

The whole-of-government approach is already delivering benefits to the community. For example, with one contact customers can now access a wide range of government services and information via the option that suits them best. All calls are now monitored and recorded for quality purposes. The hours of operation have been extended. Standard procedures have been introduced for complex inquiries.

Regional and remote clients in particular have improved access to services. Departments have also realised benefits from this initiative including significant cost savings. Where individual government agencies previously delivered services directly to customers, agencies will transfer delivery of generic services to Smart Service Queensland and benefit from the economies of scale.

Smart Service Queensland continues to streamline processes to enable customer inquiries to be resolved at the first point of contact. This will ensure delivery of a more effective service to customers. Queenslanders accessing government services can only benefit from the implementation of the Smart Service Queensland initiative. I think we have all had the occasion of phoning someone and being told to press one number, press some other number and then press another number. Smart Service Queensland aims to have you connected to the service provider after your initial phone call. I think that in itself is a boost. It is very important that people can ring up—perhaps they are not quite sure what service they require, but the staff are trained to get enough detail from them—and be directed to someone appropriate to handle their inquiry.

CHAIR: Thank you. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates of the portfolio of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors has expired. Thank you, Minister, and your departmental officers for your attendance. The transcript of this part of the hearing will be available on the Hansard page of the parliament's web site within two hours from now. The committee will now break for 10 minutes to allow for the change over to Energy and DATSIP. Thank you.

Mr PITT: Mr Chairman, before you close off, could I please make a comment? I would like to thank the committee as a whole for their in-depth questioning and for allowing me to answer those questions in a transparent and accountable way. I would like to thank my DG and the staff of both DSQ and Communities for the enormous amount of effort they have put into assisting me to prepare for this estimates hearing. I thank my own ministerial staff, who have badgered me and supported me over the past couple of weeks to prepare ourselves for this. All in all, I want to thank anyone who has been involved in assisting in any way whatsoever to make the estimates hearing today the process it has been.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister.

Proceedings suspended from 3.53 pm to 4.03 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE F—ENERGY AND ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER POLICY

In Attendance

Hon. RJ Mickel, Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy
Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy

Dr W Hoey, Director-General

Mr M Tolhurst, Assistant Director-General

Ms L O'Neill, Director, Finance and Administration Branch

Mr T McCarthy, Executive Director, Regional Operations Directorate

Ms C Cuskelly, Manager, Work and Savings Histories Branch, Regional Operations Directorate

Department of Energy

Mr S Flavell, Director-General

Mr A Millis, Deputy Director-General

Dr A Kremor, Chief Executive, Energex Limited (Acting)

Mr S Bartlett, Chief Executive Officer, Powerlink (Acting)

Mr T Bellas, Chief Executive, Ergon Energy

CHAIR: The hearings of Estimate Committee F are now resumed. The next item for consideration is the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Energy and the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. 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 single chime will give a 15-second warning, and a double chime will sound at the end of each of these time limits. An extension of time may also be given with the consent of the questioner. A double chime will also sound two minutes after an extension of time has been given. The sessional orders require that at least half the time available for questions and answers is to be allocated to non-government members. Any time extended when the committee deliberates in private is to be equally apportioned between government and non-government members.

I ask departmental officers to identify themselves when they first come forward to answer a question, if the minister refers a question to them, so that Hansard can record their name. I also ask that all mobile phones and pagers be switched off.

I now declare the proposed expenditure for the departments of Energy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy open for examination. The time allocated is three hours. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, I understand that you wish to make an opening statement of two minutes in relation to the DATSIP expenditures and then a later continuation of three minutes for Energy.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you. Mr Chairman and members of the committee, the government is charged with the responsibility of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders to break the cycle of disadvantage. This responsibility is one that the Queensland government fully accepts. It is also a responsibility that we share with others. Achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders relies on a combined effort from government, communities and businesses alike. We not only want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to get a fair go but to have a go as well. The future, like the past and the present, will not and cannot be perfect. Our children and their children will face new challenges. It is our combined task to ensure that they do not continue to face the same challenges as they do today.

I recently had the privilege of attending the Laura dance festival and NAIDOC Week celebrations, and I am encouraged by the pride demonstrated in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. I want to build on that community spirit by working with communities to break the cycle of disadvantage and build a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

I wish to thank the wonderful people I have met in communities who are having a go—the women's groups, the elders and justice groups—and who are working to confront these challenges daily. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is supporting these community leaders through innovative programs such as the Government Champions. This program teams a

director-general with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to help them address their future through negotiation table meetings. We bring all parties together at the table to look at the community's priorities and practical ways to address them. We fund community justice groups around the state not only to play a role in implementing alcohol management plans but also to come up with strategies to ease problems within their communities such as homelessness and substance abuse.

I want to reinforce this government's commitment to alcohol management plans. We will not walk away from them. They are not intended to be a one-size-fits-all approach to problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Indeed, they are one piece of a mosaic and we should not make the mistake of treating them in isolation.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will commence with the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. The first period of questioning is allocated to non-government members. It will be a block of 20 minutes. I would like to welcome the honourable members for Callide and Gregory, who have joined the committee. I call upon the honourable member for Gregory.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Good afternoon, Minister, director-general and members of the department. Minister, I refer to page 2-1 of the MPS regarding the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices initiative under which alcohol management plans have been implemented in various communities. Minister, I note that it has been necessary for alcohol restrictions to be progressively extended further from relevant communities because of concern that people from these communities are travelling extensively to obtain alcohol. I note, for example, that restrictions have been imposed at Coen, which is more than two hours by road from the nearest Aboriginal community, but in other areas like Weipa there are four or five communities within an hour's drive. In particular, the community of Napranum is just outside the town. Minister, why does this disparity in standards occur?

CHAIR: Under the standing orders, television cameras are allowed in the room only while the opening statements are being made. Thank you. Minister?

Mr MICKEL: Some non-MCMC community councils have suggested that alcohol restrictions are the reason people are moving into those communities. There have been media reports that these displaced people are causing problems in the communities and putting a strain on services. However, I am advised that we have no empirical evidence that this is happening more now than before the restrictions were imposed. It is not this government's intention to stop any person from moving from one community to another for whatever reason, nor is it the government's intention to track the movements of Indigenous peoples, as regrettably was the case in the past. We do not track the movement of people as they travel between suburbs, cities or states simply because they are white. Indigenous people have been moving from community to community for thousands of years for any number of reasons and for no reason. This should not be any business of government. Perhaps I could help the committee by asking my director-general to provide further information.

Dr Hoey: The honourable member would appreciate that the catchment area around a number of communities is quite significant. Travelling around the cape, it would be common knowledge that justice groups in many communities have been concerned about the ability of people to illicitly transfer alcohol from takeaway outlets outside restricted areas into those restricted areas, thus defeating the purpose of it. Earlier this year, at the request of justice groups in the western cape I convened a meeting involving ourselves, Liquor Licensing and other relevant officers in which these communities, the justice groups and the councils came together and said in no uncertain terms that if we were to meet the intent of the alcohol restrictions then we needed to do something about restricting the illicit supply of alcohol into those communities. People from the Liquor Licensing Division were there because they are the people who have responsibility for conducting some investigation into the impacts of any restrictions. Their reports to the community were provided. We have had some results on that. Without those restrictions in place, those communities were under threat. In other words, the people in those communities felt that the effects of alcohol harm and abuse would be sustained. We did not want to see that.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I refer again to page 2-1 of the MPS regarding alcohol restrictions. If restrictions are going to be extended to a radius of 250 kilometres from communities with alcohol management plans, will similar restrictions apply if alcohol management plans are to be implemented on communities that do not have an AMP but that clearly have alcohol problems?

Mr MICKEL: Can I just remind the committee that the alcohol management plans are management plans; they are not United States 1930s-style prohibition. I would also remind the committee that 85 per cent of the cape is not affected by an alcohol management plan.

I will answer your question on the expansion of alcohol management programs by simply saying this. Alcohol restrictions apply to only 18 communities, including Cherbourg, where there are dry place declarations only. That will increase to 19 once Palm Island implements its restrictions. This is out of a total of 32 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and out of 125 local councils in Queensland. That is, the restrictions only apply in communities where the government knew that people were suffering significantly from the effects of alcohol misuse. Alcohol restrictions are not something that we would implement or impose lightly, but they continue to be a necessary part of the government's strategy to protect the health and wellbeing of people in those communities where restrictions apply.

Members of a number of non Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities, such as Coen and Mareeba, have made requests to the government, I am advised, about introducing alcohol restrictions in their communities as a way of breaking the cycle of alcohol abuse and associated violence. A decision has been made not to progress these requests until finalisation of the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices alcohol management reviews, and this will be completed with the Palm Island review.

At that point we will have a clearer understanding of the effectiveness of particular restrictions and other requirements for effective alcohol management.

I would also like to advise the committee about breaches of restrictions. These are recorded as liquor, excluding drunkenness, offences. This data is included in the review reports and is collected by the Queensland Police Service. At this point, the Queensland Police Service does not provide my department with information that might identify individuals. In addition to that, we are currently reviewing processes for the selection of community justice groups funded by the department and will require annual reassessment of selection requirements such as criminal history checks. I am also advised that the Liquor Licensing Division of Tourism and Fair Trading is undertaking a comprehensive review of catchment area licensing conditions in relation to existing restricted areas.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, bearing in mind that my initial question was in relation to the restrictions to be imposed at Coen and that we have a businessman there who owns that hotel, when these restrictions—

Mr O'BRIEN: It was not imposed. He agreed.

Mr JOHNSON: That is all very well, but I am asking the question, not you.

CHAIR: Indeed.

Mr JOHNSON: The point I am making, Minister, is that whilst you may agree—as the member for Cook just interjected—many of these hoteliers throughout the cape and gulf communities could find themselves with non-viable enterprises in which they have invested dollars. That has to be taken into account. I ask you, Minister, have you taken that into account where these settlements are in close proximity?

Mr MICKEL: The government—and I thought the opposition; in fact, I am encouraged to believe the opposition supported the alcohol management plans because there was no division on it in the parliament—the government is committed to reducing the disastrous effects alcohol is having on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It has long been suspected that alcohol sold from licensed premises adjacent to restricted areas is contributing significantly to the alcohol related issues affecting those communities. It was for this reason that the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices strategy was implemented. The strategy is the government's response to Justice Fitzgerald's work, which specifically referred to the need to increase sly grog surveillance and to impose 'tougher licensing conditions on liquor supply outlets in and around communities'.

It has been no secret for the past three years that there may need to be tougher conditions imposed on catchment area licensed premises to ensure that the alcohol management plans are as effective as possible. It would be almost beyond belief that licensees anywhere on the cape, and certainly those within driving distance of any of the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities, were unaware of that possibility. They have had plenty of time to monitor and adjust their own practices to help ensure the alcohol management plans achieve what they are intended to achieve, which includes communities where children and women remain safe from alcohol related violence.

I am advised that recent evidence based investigations that were conducted by the Liquor Licensing Division throughout the Cape York peninsula have identified a number of catchment area premises that are the source of much of the alcohol being brought illegally into the communities. Conditioning liquor licensees at Cape York catchment area premises is not intended to disadvantage hoteliers. I am advised that a number of hoteliers have agreed to and implemented the recommended restrictions, including the Burketown pub, the Archer River Roadhouse and the Musgrave Telegraph roadhouse.

Conditioning liquor licences is essential to address the grave disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face in dealing with alcohol related violence and abuse. This must be more important than any effect on profit margins for the sources of that alcohol.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, before I ask the next question, can I say that we in the opposition are committed to helping the government correct the problem. The three opposition members here—the member for Callide, the member for Charters Towers and me—are certainly members who have close affiliations with Indigenous communities and who understand them well. I think that my two colleagues would vouch for that. Minister, I refer you to the construction of the Happy Valley facility in Townsville, which is referred to in dot point 4 on page 2-6 of the MPS. Can you advise if alcohol is sold or consumed at this facility?

Mr MICKEL: I will just make a brief comment about Happy Valley. The department is meeting the government's commitment to providing basic infrastructure on the site at Happy Valley to substantially improve the amenity for users. The provision of services to Happy Valley falls within the government's priority of improving health care and strengthening services to the community.

I think it would be better if I called upon the Executive Director of Regional Operations, Terry McCarthy, who I understand is familiar with Happy Valley. If it is okay with the committee, I will ask him to come forward.

Mr McCarthy: Happy Valley has been an Aboriginal gathering place for many, many years. There are up to 70 people living in a small community based in Happy Valley. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has tried to provide some amenities for that small community who live there. To the best of my knowledge, alcohol is not sold there, but it may be transported or carried there. There are no restrictions on the people who live in that community. It is a part of Townsville. We have built a toilet block for the community. We are in the process of building a small block that will allow Department of Communities people and department of health people to go there and work with the community to resolve some of the issues that those people face. Whilst alcohol may be transported there—as it may be in any other part of Townsville—to the best of my knowledge it is certainly not sold in that community.

Mr JOHNSON: Mr McCarthy, are you saying that that facility is a part of Townsville; it has nothing to do with an Aboriginal community or anything else?

Mr McCarthy: It is not part of a DOGIT community. It is a community which lives on a reserve. There are a number of blocks of land. Part of it is actually a cemetery reserve. Some of it is under the control of the airport. However, it is not a designated Aboriginal community.

Mr JOHNSON: Minister, I again refer you to the merit based initiatives at page 2-8 of the MPS. I remind you of the constant frustration of communities which are funded to develop programs which prove successful and popular but then disappear because there does not appear to be a clear pathway for recurrent funding regardless of the success of some of these initiatives. Can you please explain to the committee the process for evaluating initiatives and the pathway for them to be allocated recurrent funding?

Mr MICKEL: Could I just ask what number you are referring to?

Mr JOHNSON: page 2-8 of the MPS.

Mr MICKEL: Which line of it are you referring to?

Mr JOHNSON: The second bottom dot point states, 'Monitor and evaluate projects funded by the Queensland Illicit Drug Diversion Initiative.' There are various issues in relation to programs right throughout the cape and the gulf areas.

Mr MICKEL: I will ask the director-general to either answer that or ask an officer to answer that.

Dr Hoey: Any project that our small department undertakes is evaluated both before and after we undertake it to make sure that we get value for money. I think the honourable member might also be hinting at projects, for example, of an economic development nature of which the future is a little unknown and, therefore, their likelihood of success is very limited. For a large project, it would be automatic to undertake a feasibility study. That would be routine. No person in their right mind would approve any sort of funding without that.

The other thing that we must take into account in all of this is the capability of the local people—be it the council or any group—to undertake these things. Therefore, while departmental officers might have the ability to administer program funds, we are very mindful of the capacity of local groups. Therefore, we and other agencies work closely with them to try to build that up. I guess that is evident in a number of areas. You will not get sustainable development in any of these communities unless there is that permanent capacity in those areas.

Mr Johnson, while no doubt people like to highlight certain failures around investment, we are very keen on getting the outcomes. We look at the likelihood of economic success and the likelihood of social success, including the capacity of people to deliver on time in a remote location. You would understand the difficulties involved in that. Most of all, we want to see the transfer of those skills to those local people. Every skill that we transfer means that they are less dependent on us in the future.

Nevertheless, as a CEO, I have to be satisfied on our investment—or if I am working with colleagues in other agencies, which I do quite frequently because they are the big service deliverers; I provide advice to them on obtaining the best outcomes and the best value for money. There are a suite of mechanisms for evaluation from economic evaluation to surveys. Let me say that we take that matter very seriously, because we are very conscious of the amount of money that has been invested in a number of areas and we want to see better outcomes for the dollars invested.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you.

CHAIR: That concludes the first block of questions. Minister, page 2-1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to finalising the Queensland's government's \$55.4 million reparation offer. Could you advise the committee how many applications have been received to date, the amount of the reparations paid to date and the steps being undertaken by DATSIP to heighten community awareness of the offer?

Mr MICKEL: I am pleased to advise the committee that as of 30 June 2005 I am advised that the department has received 7,806 claims under the Indigenous wages and savings reparations process. I am advised that at that date it had paid \$15.684 million in individual reparation payments.

Since the beginning of the reparations process in February 2003, DATSIP's six regional officers have conducted community information sessions throughout each region to ensure that potential claimants are aware of the offer and how to lodge a claim. In June 2004, the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process was advertised nationally, as well as in Queensland, in major newspapers and using the national Indigenous radio service.

In 2005, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy is promoting the reparations process throughout Queensland through a diverse range of strategies. These include presentations to community groups in remote, rural and regional centres; visits to communities, hostels, nursing homes and prisons with significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents; the dissemination of information through relevant agencies such as Commonwealth and state government departments, Indigenous organisations, mining companies, land councils and forums such as negotiation tables and regional manager coordination networks; and the distribution of promotional material at events attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, such as NAIDOC, the Camooweal drovers camp, the Doomadgee rodeo and, of course, the fabulous Laura dance festival.

In addition, the reparations process and its closing date of 31 December 2005 for lodgement of claims will be advertised again shortly in Indigenous press and the mainstream media. These will include Indigenous publications, regional newspapers in Queensland, as well as the Northern Territory and Western Australia, which have a significant Torres Strait Islander population, the National Indigenous Radio Service and Darwin radio stations. Each of the department's regional offices has a PowerPoint presentation, information sheets and posters to assist in informing communities about the Indigenous wages and savings reparation process. They also have seven 1800 freecall numbers in each relevant office. Information about the government's reparation offer and the administrative process is published on the department's web site, which also provides monthly updates on the assessment and payment of claims. I would point out, Mr Chairman, that the Queensland government was the first jurisdiction to offer this type of reparation, I am advised, and I would urge all members to make people in their communities who may be eligible aware that 31 December is the closing date.

Mr O'BRIEN: Page 2-5 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement says 'Supported the establishment of a community justice reference group'. Can you please outline the reasons for establishing this group and its achievements during the 2004-05 financial year?

Mr MICKEL: I thank you for what is a very important question and I know one that is very important to you in your electorate. Community justice groups play an important role in the Queensland government's response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Historical, social and economic factors contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders in the state criminal justice system. The Local Justice Initiatives Program administered by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy provides funds to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to develop strategies within their communities. The goal of the program is to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander overrepresentation in the criminal justice system.

The program is flexible enough to enable communities to develop initiatives to meet their particular needs. The department's regional officers work with community justice groups to facilitate improved links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and statutory workers, police, courts and other parts of the justice system, including juvenile justice. The department assists Indigenous communities to develop community based diversionary and interventionist strategies that, in cooperation with other state agencies, prevent and/or provide alternatives to arrest and custody. Justice group members can and do provide input to magistrates and participate in the rehabilitation of offenders, as well as implementing localised innovative crime prevention strategies especially targeting youth crime.

The community justice groups in deed of grant in trust communities also develop and implement local strategies for addressing underlying issues, including the development of alcohol management plans. Many groups reinvigorate traditional authority structures and methods of social control such as the power of elders, restorative justice methods, traditional dispute resolution, customary law, and cultural strengthening. The Local Justice Initiatives Program requires a joint effort between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and government agencies in Queensland to reach its objective.

At a conference of coordinators organised by the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy in December 2004, a proposal for a reference group was made. The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy gave an undertaking that it would assist the community

justice groups to form this group. However, the issue for funding of groups has also been identified as a priority and a decision was made to review the operation of the groups focusing on outcomes achieved. As a result of the review, the reference group has not been formed. However, once the review is completed, which is anticipated to be in September 2005, the department envisages that the reference group will then be formed. It is proposed that one of the group's first tasks will be to comment on the findings of the review.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 2-6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement allocates \$0.6 million to assist ATSI organisations to undertake projects which enhance participation in NAIDOC Week activities. Could you please advise how that funding is distributed between organisations and if there is a key theme to these projects?

Mr MICKEL: Thank you again for what is a very important question coming so soon after NAIDOC. The National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee Week, which is NAIDOC, is an important event across the nation. It provides a forum to bring to the attention of both government and the general community the issues of concern of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The event has been nationally active for the last 81 years. The national secretariat has set the theme for 2005, which was 'Our Future Begins with Solidarity'. The themes set for NAIDOC Week are focused around reconciliation and are intended to enhance the participation of the general community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in NAIDOC Week activities. They are also intended to raise awareness and understanding in the general community of the significance of NAIDOC Week to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They are also intended to enhance the process of reconciliation within the Queensland community.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy approved \$60,000 in funding to community organisations for NAIDOC Week celebrations. This funding assists organisations to undertake projects that enhance NAIDOC Week activities. To promote and ensure a broad range of organisations were aware of the NAIDOC Week Community Grants Program, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy placed advertisements in a number of city and regional newspapers. The advertisements sought expressions of interest from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups wishing to undertake projects for NAIDOC Week. Each application for funding is individually assessed at a regional level and prioritised in accordance with the program objectives. Each region has a notional allocation of \$10,000. A total of 59 organisations across Queensland were funded for the 2005 NAIDOC Week. This includes \$9,000 provided to a total of 13 organisations in the south Queensland region; \$10,000 to a total of nine organisations from central Queensland; \$10,010 to a total of 14 organisations from the far-north Queensland region; \$10,000 was provided to a total of nine organisations from western Queensland; \$10,000 to four organisations from the Torres Strait; and \$11,058 to 10 organisations from north Queensland.

Some of the activities carried out by the groups include hosting a cultural open day for Indigenous and non-Indigenous community members, hosting a fun day with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in local areas, holding a family fun day which engages in cultural and social activities, including a baby show and golden oldies, an elders luncheon and youth presentations, traditional and contemporary dancing and cultural food sampling, promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through school activities, involving young people in learning about Indigenous art and meanings and cooking of traditional food; and elders participating and teaching culture to schoolchildren through traditional stories.

Mr FENLON: Minister, page 2-5 says that DATSIP promotes recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Minister, what support has DATSIP given to the Laura Dance Festival and what is the significance of that particular event?

Mr MICKEL: Thank you for the question. I was pleased to see the member for Cook and the minister for education at the Laura festival with us. It is a biennial event celebrating the song, dance and culture of Aboriginal people of Cape York Peninsula. The festival is staged near the township of Laura, a small outback down on the Peninsula Development Road. The Laura festival allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be at the same place at the one time to display their pride in their culture with their families and friends. The event provides a significant opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to display their culture and history to a wide audience, and there certainly was a wide audience.

The theme of the 2005 Laura festival was 'Caring for Children, Caring for Families'. As I said in the wrapping up on the day, I was so pleased with the behaviour there. It was a completely alcohol and drug-free event—magnificent—and it proved that alcohol management plans can work to provide a safe and secure environment. With that, I want to congratulate the organisers and the participants for their leadership in showing and staging an event which was drug and alcohol free. I also want to take the opportunity to congratulate, in front of this audience today, the Injinoo community for not only winning this year's festival but also their courage in taking part despite losing community members in the tragic Lockhart River tragedy.

The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy provided funding of \$15,000 as an industry contribution to Arts Queensland to support the Laura Dance Festival and the celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The contribution reinforced the partnered approach of the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Arts Queensland to the festival. The festival focused on celebrating culture and children and included a dance program, language seminars, short film festival events, sharing experiences in business development and governance forums. The theme, 'Caring for Children, Caring for Families' was very significant as it allowed children and youth from all communities to play a very important role in the festival by performing their dances and telling the stories. It encouraged a great desire from the children to learn the traditional way of their ancestors through the elders of today. Elders are highly regarded and sought after as they are the only source of traditional knowledge for the amazing performances displayed by children and youth at the Laura festival. The enthusiasm, pride and enjoyment displayed by the children gave great hope and promise to the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. More than 20 communities and their schools were invited to participate in the festival. Three project officers and the assistant regional director—

CHAIR: Minister, your time has expired.

Mr FENLON: Page 2-7 of the MPS says that DATSIP continued to provide access to historical departmental records. What is the significance of those records and who has sought access to them?

Mr MICKEL: I thank you for the question, which is very important to a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, because the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy through the Community and Personal Histories Branch provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with access to records created by past government agencies which were responsible for the administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs in Queensland. The branch receives between 600 and 1,000 requests per year I am advised and some of the clients include, for example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, native title representative bodies acting on behalf of native title claimants, Link-Up, which helps reunite Indigenous peoples removed from their families, academics and students. Since 1992, I understand, the branch has responded to over 6,000 requests for access. The demand for this service has increased significantly over the past 10 years. For the six months from January to June 2005, over 650 requests for records have been received. The current waiting period for non-urgent requests is between 12 and 18 months.

The records administered by the Community and Personal Histories Branch document information relating to the removal of Indigenous people to government and church-controlled reserves and the administration of their property and employment. The records also document details relating to people's birth, death and marriage which has often not been recorded by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. Over 20,000 personal files, thousands of cards documenting family details and administrative correspondence were created by the Office of the Chief Protector of Aboriginals and the Director of Native Affairs Office between 1898 and 1965. The Community and Personal Histories Branch has indexed a large majority of these records to ensure efficient access to the information contained within the files. The majority of records are held at Queensland State Archives on restricted access. Access is provided by an administrative release process, therefore negating the need for people to go through freedom of information, although this avenue can still be used if desired.

Other services of the Community and Personal Histories Branch provide clients with access to records of the Queensland Colonial Secretary's Office which covers the period 1859 to 1898. It also assists people to access church records generated by the mission settlements and archival records created by other government agencies. The records can also provide Indigenous families with information about where they come from and who they are related to. This information is vital to many Indigenous people who are looking for their families and undertaking native title research. The services provided by the Community and Personal Histories Branch have been recognised nationally as an example of best practice in the area of information service delivery to Indigenous peoples.

Mr FENLON: Minister, page 2-8 of the MPS states 'Contribute \$0.04 million to Queensland Health for the Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership'. Could you please explain what this partnership aims to achieve?

Mr MICKEL: The Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership is being conducted in partnership between Rio Tinto and the Australian, Queensland, Western Australian and Northern Territory governments, the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research of Western Australia and the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation. The Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership aims to deliver improvements in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and focuses on specific aspects of health. These include: health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiatives targeting the effects of drinking and smoking on maternal and child health; building health service capacity and infrastructure around child and maternal health in Aboriginal communities; and expanding the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research's child health survey research and database of information to encourage Aboriginal communities from Western Australia, Queensland and Northern Territory.

Queensland Health, by funding health workers in the three trial sites of Townsville, Inala and Kowanyama, is leading the Queensland component of projects relating to building health service capacity and infrastructure and expanding the survey research and database information. These health workers are being trained, community action plans are being implemented and health promotion resources and programs are being developed to address foetal alcohol syndrome.

The Townsville project is building upon the active antenatal program implemented by the Aboriginal and Islander Health Service. The positive results that this service has achieved have been highlighted nationally. I want to thank corporate Australia, in this case Rio Tinto, for their involvement in this program. We have a number of corporate agencies actively involved in programs to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and this has been one of them.

CHAIR: We might take another block of non-government questions.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer to the MPS page 2-8 at dot point 3, which relates to the allocation of \$5 million to merit based initiatives. What initiatives are to be funded under this program? You will note that there has been \$3 million allocated this year and \$2 million allocated for next year.

Mr MICKEL: The Partnerships Queensland budget strategy was endorsed by the government on 22 November 2004. It is a flexible framework to fund initiatives aimed at enhancing the quality of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is one aspect of funding under Partnerships Queensland. Partnerships Queensland's budget strategy features two key components. The success of the strategy will require the integration of strategic and operational planning among agencies that align with negotiation table processes and the goals and performance measures of Partnerships Queensland.

A pool of incentive funds will be allocated according to the merit of the proposed initiatives. Successful proposals will address the issues at the heart of Partnerships Queensland and the Council of Australian Governments' principles. The 2005-06 budget provided \$5 million in funding over two years for the strategy with \$3 million in 2005-06 to focus on Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communities and \$2 million in 2006-07 for Indigenous communities across Queensland.

Incentive funds are held by DATSIP as the department responsible for administering the incentive pool. The funding is intended to supplement an agency's own resources and leverage strategic action through initiatives that demonstrate innovative and leading practice consistent with the goals of Partnerships Queensland and which are responsive to the issues identified through negotiation tables. Incentive funds are in addition to the agency's ongoing responsibility for current initiatives. Joined up cross-agency proposals have been encouraged and will be facilitated through Partnerships Queensland's government mechanisms, including the Partnerships Queensland CEO committee.

A condition of the allocation of funding is that it be matched or highly leveraged by agencies. Agencies are also required to continue to fund programs that receive a positive evaluation from within existing resources. Agencies in receipt of funds from the pool will be required to implement effective and efficient services with an emphasis on outcomes and solutions. Service providers will be required to participate and review evaluation processes, guided by the government agency sponsoring the initiative.

Incentive pool funding guidelines were forwarded to all directors-general early this year inviting applications for the first round of funding in 2005-06. My department and the Department of the Premier and Cabinet have evaluated all submissions and will put forward recommendations for my consideration. Following my consideration I will submit endorsed applications to the Premier and Minister for Trade for consideration and final approval of the allocation of the incentive funds.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer to dot point 7 on page 2-8 of the MPS which refers to the delivery of intervention and diversion activities related to the abuse of alcohol and other substances. Does that mean that these services will now be provided to all cape communities?

Mr MICKEL: Substance misuse has long been recognised as a serious concern affecting the health and wellbeing of many Indigenous families, especially young people, across Queensland. To help address this issue, in the 2004-05 budget the department received \$12 million over four years to implement a range of initiatives to manage demand for alcohol and other substances under the Meeting the Challenges of Substance Misuse Strategy—a strategy addressing the misuse of substances, including alcohol, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland.

Substance abuse, regrettably, includes petrol sniffing, chroming, sniffing melting PVC pipe fumes and other drug use such as marijuana. In those communities where alcohol management plans and alcohol restrictions have been reviewed, the reviews have found that where there is a zero carriage limit some young people who had been drinking alcohol before the restrictions came in have now turned to other substances. Anecdotal reports are that small numbers of children have joined existing groups of teenagers and children sniffing or smoking. During alcohol management review consultations a number of communities also reported increased marijuana use.

While alcohol restrictions have not significantly increased the levels of substance abuse among young people in these communities, I think all honourable members on the committee would know that

it is a serious issue and will be addressed on a community-by-community basis through the Meeting the Challenges of Substance Misuse Strategy.

As part of the alcohol management reviews community elders from Aurukun, Doomadgee, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, the Mornington shire and Napranum have reported concerns about substance abuse. In each case the substance abuse identified has also been an issue in the community prior to the commencement of alcohol restrictions. A number of people had the perception in Aurukun, for example, that petrol sniffing was on the rise. It has involved mostly, I understand, male sniffers aged 14 to 23. Reports of the number of people involved ranged from 20 to 60, with some as young as nine years old and some adults sniffing.

In Doomadgee I am advised that substance abuse and marijuana use among a growing number of young people was reported as a serious and concerning issue. Petrol and to a lesser extent paint and Dencorub sniffing is said to be most prevalent in the eight- to 14-year-old age group. Apart from the obvious health risks, it is said to be leading to increased youth property crime.

In Kowanyama, another gulf area, the people commented that boredom among young people resulted in antisocial behaviour, including increased substance abuse. Some people have commented that young people have turned to petrol sniffing.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer to the proposal announced in 2003 to wind up the Aborigines Welfare Fund, which has assets of almost \$10 million, and for a foundation to be established to manage these assets. Page 2-12 of the MPS refers to the appointment of an eminent persons group to administer this foundation and states that the funds will be used to advance the development of the skills and prosperity of Aboriginal people in communities. Is this not a role for the department and does that not just amount to taking the assets back into consolidated revenue and spending those funds on what would otherwise be government responsibilities?

Mr MICKEL: In 2002 consultations on the reparations offer were conducted with Indigenous communities throughout the state. Proposals for the distribution of the Aborigines Welfare Fund, which was \$9.6 million as at 30 June 2005, were canvassed in these consultations. The government has already announced that this fund would be wound up and a foundation established to advance the development of the skills and prosperity of Queensland Aboriginal people and communities.

The government decided that any unspent funds from the government's offer of reparation should be transferred to the Aborigines Welfare Fund—a proportion to be used for Torres Strait Islander programs. The reparation offer is not expected to be finalised until June 2006. It is not known at this stage what funds will remain and be able to be transferred.

In 2004-05 the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Policy commenced researching possible models for this foundation and I expect to have options developed for the government's consideration during 2005-06. As the Aborigines Welfare Fund is protected by the Aboriginal Communities (Land and Justice Matters) Act 1984, changes to its management will require legislative amendment. Those amendments are required in order to transfer the funding to a foundation. However, these changes cannot be finalised until there is agreement on the government's arrangements for the proposed foundation.

If it is all right with the committee I will also say that the liability for the reparation offer was vested with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Policy on behalf of the government. The Australian accounting standards—in particular, AASB 1044, 'Provisions, contingent liabilities and contingent assets'—require that all liabilities be quantified in dollar terms wherever possible.

Whilst it will not be possible to identify the total payout figure until the process has been finalised, the effect of adopting this accounting standard means that a provision is required to be raised resulting in a liability being recorded in the actual financial statements as opposed to being referred to as a contingent liability in the notes section which is attached to the statements. The standards state that if the payment of a liability is deemed to be 'probable'—that is, the probability of it eventuating is greater than 50 per cent—then that liability needs to be reported in the financial statements. This was the view taken with respect to this reparation process. Where the liability is to be extinguished over a number of years, the net present value of all payments needs to be calculated. This will allow the reporting of the liability in terms of 'today's dollars'.

Mr JOHNSON: I made mention of the eminent persons group. Are you going to form that group?

Mr MICKEL: What page in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement are you referring to?

Mr JOHNSON: In the question I just asked you I referred to the MPS on page 2-12 and the appointment of an eminent persons group to administer this foundation. It says that the funds will be used to advance the development of skills and prosperity. Are you going to establish that eminent persons group?

Mr MICKEL: I will ask my director-general to advise the committee on where we are at with that.

Dr Hoey: The honourable member needs to appreciate that that is before us. We are required, as the minister said, to provide him with some proposals to consider for administering the fund in the future.

That will take place once the quantum of dollars has been determined when the reparation offer is wound up. We would not expect to have figures until the end of this current financial year. During this current financial year the minister has asked us to consider options and we will be putting those forward. An eminent persons group would be a part of that process.

Mr JOHNSON: You talk there about the reparation group. I draw your attention to page 2-1 of the MPS and the \$55.4 million to finalise the reparation offer. Has all this funding gone to people? It says that there have been 7,717 claims and that 4,474 have been approved, which amounts to \$15.3 million. It appears almost half of the claims are not eligible. Is that a fact?

Mr MICKEL: To allay any fears of the committee that this money and the process is suspect, I ask Christine Cuskelly to come forward if that is all right with you, Mr Chairman?

CHAIR: Yes.

Mr MICKEL: She is our expert on this and she will allay any fears, I assure you.

Ms Cuskelly: Currently we are running at about 68 per cent of claims being assessed as eligible.

Mr JOHNSON: Fifty-eight per cent?

Ms Cuskelly: Sixty-eight per cent. So that leaves 32 per cent ineligible. The main reason for an assessment of ineligibility is either that people do not meet the date of birth or date of death criteria. That amounts to about eight per cent of assessed claims. Of the remaining 24 per cent, the department is unable to find records that evidence a wages or savings control. However, for most of those claimants we do find evidence in departmental records or provided by the claimants themselves that suggests that they or their families were not subject to the controls of the protection act and therefore that their wages or savings were not controlled.

Mr JOHNSON: So what you are really saying is there is probably still about \$40 million left in that fund. Would that be pretty much the—

Ms Cuskelly: The expenditure to date is around \$15 million so, yes, there is about \$40 million left.

Mr JOHNSON: So with the balance of that, Minister, what do you envisage will happen now with this program? I know that the Premier rang me about it at the time and we had a bipartisan agreement on it, and it is one in respect of which I think there would be many people who would be making applications and who probably could not justify the applications. I would be interested to know what you may have in mind for that other \$40 million?

Mr MICKEL: I will answer it this way: I would rather that all members of parliament and all communities focus on the fact that we still have until 31 December to run, so I would urge people to let community members know—you have communities in your own area—that the 31st is the closing date so that we can give people who may be out there but who do not know about it, even after all this time, the opportunity to apply. I would urge all members of the committee, too, if they know of people who are having trouble with their application forms—I am going to put this on you, Christine—to contact Christine. She will be fair, but you would appreciate that it is a process that has to be accountable and will be accountable to the taxpayers. It will be a transparent process; it is a fair process.

So my answer to the honourable member would be to say this: we will mount a vigorous advertising campaign. I urge all members of parliament to get involved in the same process and hopefully people who are not aware of that program will come forward in that time and we will see what is left at that point. I want to reassure people that the money is there but I think, as you have just heard from Christine's answer, it is a fair process. We are not trying to do people out of something that they are entitled to. Did you want to add anything to that, Christine? You are embarking on a magical mystery tour soon. Do you want to tell people all about that? No, she is shy.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you, Christine. Minister, I refer again to the welfare fund we touched on a moment ago, and I ask: what has been the delay in preparing the options paper on this fund, given that the proposal was announced in 2003? When will this options paper be released and when will consultation begin?

Mr MICKEL: Mr Chairman, I will ask the director-general to answer the question.

Dr Hoey: The minister has already mentioned the closing date for applications—31 December 2005. That is an extension from an earlier closing date because we had been advised formally and informally that people were not aware or they knew somebody who knew somebody who was not coming forward, so hence the extension. That extension has meant that we are focused on advertising and, as the minister has said, making people aware so that we do not end up at the end of the process with people saying, 'We didn't know anything about it.' It is not until we are finished that we will be in a position to know the number of the dollars that will go into the Aborigines Welfare Fund. So, yes, we have some work to do; it is not a matter of putting that off. There has been some work done on that but it would be premature to say, 'This is what it's going to be' until we have finished the reparations process. We are focusing on that. You would be aware that there has been a lot of publicity about that and comparison of Queensland with other states. As the minister said, we were the first to go out with this offer.

The original estimates indicated that you would need a large pool to satisfy the potential claimants. That does not appear to have been the case but we do not want to assume that the next six months will be the same pro rata. If there are people out there, we want to make sure and we want to get this right. We also want to get the Aborigines Welfare Fund right and there has been some good thinking on it, and there is a range of options to consider so it is not as if we have been putting that off. We have been focusing on that reparations process. I can assure the honourable member that it is not some job that we have parked. That is a critical part of it because many of our clientele, as you would be aware, are focusing on what is in the Aborigines Welfare Fund or what might be in it and what it might be used for. We want to focus on that job at hand first and do some careful thinking, as the minister has said, about how to invest this considerable sum to get the best outcomes—whether to focus on young people, health, whatever. The challenges are many.

Mr JOHNSON: Thank you.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. That concludes the time for that portion of questions by non-government members. We will now have a block of 20 minutes of questions from government members. I call the honourable member for Ferny Grove.

Mr WILSON: Minister, page 2-7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement says 'Participated in the working group to develop the Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Participation Strategy.' Could you inform the committee what the development of this strategy will bring to Indigenous communities around the state?

Mr MICKEL: Mr Chairman, I thank the member for the question. The Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Participation Strategy is aimed at bringing Indigenous Queenslanders education, employment and income levels to comparative levels with the non-Indigenous community. It outlines a series of actions for government agencies and communities to build opportunities and take advantage of existing opportunities for training, employment generation and business development. This includes a range of action from business mentoring schemes to location-specific economic plans.

The Department of State Development and Innovation, the Department of Employment and Training, the Department of Education and the Arts and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy are coordinating their efforts to bridge the gaps between school, TAFE and industry and ensuring the pathways and connections exist that can provide a better and more secure future. Indigenous young people are more likely to leave school early and, regrettably, to have lower rates of participation in attainment of secondary and post-secondary schooling. Indigenous adults are less likely to participate in the labour force than non-Indigenous adults. They are more likely to experience unemployment as they age and are more likely to be long-term welfare dependent. This is despite research that clearly shows that Indigenous people want to work just as much as any other Australian. The Queensland Indigenous Economic Development and Participation Strategy provides a framework for government, communities and industry to work together on the ground at a local level and to develop opportunities that are realistic.

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Minister. Can I take you to page 2-5 of the MPS which refers to community capacity building? Minister, what steps have been taken to clarify the roles of community justice groups and local councils to ensure there is no confusion about their respective roles?

Mr MICKEL: I thank you for the question because it is one, as you move around communities, that causes a series of spirited discussions on occasions. Community justice groups were established by the Goss government in 1993 and are funded to deal more effectively with social and justice issues in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Community justice groups deal with a range of issues including assisting in the development and implementation of alcohol management plans, providing assistance to the court in relation to sentencing decisions and bail applications, conducting mediation and counselling activities within their communities and conducting night patrols.

As part of the government's response to the recommendations made by Justice Fitzgerald in his report, the Cape York Justice Study, those community justice groups operating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils are now authorised to regulate the possession and drinking of alcohol in the community area by making dry place declarations for public places in the community area, and in defined circumstances can also make dry place declarations for private places and make recommendations regarding the introduction of restricted area declarations or matters associated with the operation of the local canteen.

The Community Services Legislation Amendment Act 2002 expanded the role and functions of community justice groups. Following commencement of the legislation, the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy conducted a series of training and information sessions with the coordinators and members of the statutory community justice groups. These statutory community justice groups are now operating in most deed of grant in trust communities and in the Aurukun community.

Following a period of consultation with each community, community justice groups are regulated under the provisions of the Aboriginal Communities (Justice and Land Matters) Act 1984. Each community has its own regulation that sets out the roles and functions of the individual group. The

regulation ensures that each group has legislative protection in carrying out its role in addressing problems associated with alcohol abuse and misuse within the community. While all groups, statutory or non-statutory, have a role in dealing with justice related matters, the statutory groups have an extra role in dealing with alcohol related issues and for this reason have the added protection of legislative backing behind them.

In December 2004 the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy held a two-day workshop in Brisbane that brought together the coordinators from all 39 community justice groups from across Queensland. Speakers at the workshop included the Chief Justice of Queensland, other judges and magistrates, representatives from the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and other government agencies and representatives from the non-government sector. The aim of this workshop was to share information with the different stakeholders and to clarify the role of community justice groups in the criminal justice system. As a result of the Local Government (Community Government Areas) Act 2004—can I conclude, Mr Chair?

CHAIR: If you want extra time, Minister, just ask. I am sure the honourable member will agree to two minutes.

Mr MICKEL: I know your interest in legal matters and this is a critical issue and I would like to be able to expand upon it for two minutes?

CHAIR: Two minutes.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you. The responsibility for funding and management of Aboriginal councils is now the responsibility of the department of local government and planning. As part of the government's commitment to best practice in relation to the operations of all councils in Queensland, that department is now providing corporate governance and innovative leadership training for all Aboriginal councillors. This training is being conducted as part of the Community Governance Improvement Strategy and, as part of this training, the roles of councils and councillors is discussed at some length. I want to place on record my thanks to the many members of community justice groups with whom I have met. I find that they are people who are vitally interested in the welfare of their community and the welfare of the young people within their community. They are very much community-minded residents who simply want the best outcomes for the people who come before them.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 2-8 of the MPS says that DATSIP will continue to work with the relevant community justice groups and councils to develop and implement improved alcohol management arrangements. Could you detail the improvements which have taken place in communities with alcohol management plans?

Mr MICKEL: I would like to thank the member for Cook not just for the question but also for the leadership that he has displayed. I know that alcohol management plans are difficult; I know that. There is always an element of the community who is opposed to them, but I want to thank you for your courage in standing up and arguing not for the people who come before you arguing for the implementation of them but for the women and children who I think in many instances are the silent sufferers. So thank you for that leadership.

To answer your question, 19 communities have been targeted under the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices initiatives for the implementation of alcohol management arrangements that may include restricted area regulations under the Liquor Act or dry place declarations. The 19 communities are Aurukun, Cherbourg, Doomadgee, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Mornington Island, Napranum, Palm Island, Pormpuraaw, Woorabinda, Wujal Wujal, Yarrabah and the northern peninsula area communities of Bamaga, Seisia, Injinoo, New Mapoon and Umagico. The review process involves measuring the impact of restrictions on levels of alcohol related crime and violence and the general wellbeing of community members via important indicators such as health, crime rates, hospitalisation rates, incidents of domestic violence and school attendance rates.

Review reports have been presented to five of these communities—Aurukun, Doomadgee, Napranum, Mornington Island and Mapoon—and a process has commenced to negotiate future alcohol management efforts in these communities. Review reports are currently being drafted for Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Lockhart River and Wujal Wujal. The review process has also commenced for Yarrabah, Hope Vale, Woorabinda and the northern peninsula area communities of Bamaga, Seisia, Injinoo, New Mapoon and Umagico. The impact of the restrictions in these 17 Indigenous communities has so far been encouraging.

In general most communities, I am advised, have reported that community life had improved significantly since the introduction of their alcohol management plan and restrictions. In these communities reviewed to date, the general findings, I am advised, are that significant community members, police, hospital workers and women's shelter coordinators have reported that admissions to the women's shelter for protection from domestic violence reduced and that the proportion of clients accessing the shelter for respite from family duties had increased. Police and hospital workers have reported that injuries from alcohol related assaults were less severe and police reported that they were able to reason with people in conflict situations. Could I have two minutes to finish that answer?

CHAIR: The member for Cook might have another question for you and it might be that you could finish the answer then.

Mr O'BRIEN: I am happy to give him an extension of time.

Mr MICKEL: Many people have mentioned that the community was quieter, making it easier for some people to sleep. Key members of the community have mentioned that workers were more likely to be present at work without hangovers, less stressed and better able to do their jobs. Some people have said that ceremonial events such as house openings were conducted with more planning, effort, energy and attention and people were more participatory. Some people have mentioned that families were spending more time undertaking traditional activities such as hunting and fishing.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 2-8 says that DATSIP continues to review alcohol management plans and alcohol restrictions. What is the process for reviewing the plans and how many reviews are under way? I know you have talked briefly about that.

Mr MICKEL: Yes. I just repeat that 19 communities have been targeted under the Meeting Challenges, Making Choices initiative for the implementation of alcohol management arrangements which may include restricted area regulations under the Liquor Act or dry place declarations. I have told the committee where the 19 communities are. Alcohol restrictions have now been implemented in 18 of the 19 remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities identified in the Cape York Justice Study. Proposed alcohol restrictions for Palm Island have been discussed, but I think I will wait until the all-party committee report has something to say. It may well have something to say on alcohol management plans and I do not want to pre-empt that. Alcohol management reviews have commenced for 17 of the 19 communities. Reviews for Cherbourg and, as I said, Palm Island are expected to commence 12 months after the implementation of the restrictions. Dry place declarations came into effect in Cherbourg on 17 December 2004.

The review process involves measuring the impact of restrictions on levels of alcohol related crime and violence and the general wellbeing of community members via important indicators such as health, crime rates, hospitalisation rates, incidents of domestic violence and school attendance rates. Review reports have been presented to five of these communities—Aurukun, Doomadgee, Napranum, Mornington Island and Mapoon—and a process has commenced to negotiate future alcohol management efforts in these communities. Review reports are currently being drafted for Kowanyama, Pormpuraaw, Lockhart River and Wujal Wujal. A review process has commenced in Yarrabah, Hope Vale, Woorabinda and northern peninsula area communities of Bamaga, Seisa, Injinoo, New Mapoon and Umagico.

Mr O'BRIEN: I think you said you might not want to answer this question because it is a matter currently before a committee of the House. I do want to ask you about the alcohol management plan on Palm Island and when you think that will be implemented. I know you referred to that before.

Mr MICKEL: My own view of it—and I have said this to the department—if it went ahead with it now is that I do not want to do a discourtesy to a committee that I understand has been working very, very well on Palm Island. It may well have something to say about that. I think I can be patient enough with an alcohol management plan for Palm Island to wait and see whether the committee does say anything about that. The answer I am going to give you today is, yes, we will have a plan, but I want to wait and see what the all-party committee may have to say on that process. In other words, Palm Island will not be treated as a special case. It will be subject, ultimately, to an alcohol management plan.

When you look at the issues of domestic violence and child abuse, we tend to think of child abuse as just one aspect. There is the other aspect that I think is just as insidious, and that is child neglect—kids roaming streets at night, kids going to school with no breakfast or lunch. So it is that wider term of neglect. That is why we are going to stick with that. As I say, I praise the member for Cook for what is a hard sell in your area; I know that. But I also know this: stick with it, because whenever I raise it and say that it is a tough issue and that we are not backing down on it, it is the women in the groups, the women in the audiences, who may not say much but they all nod and nod in acceptance of the fact that we are going to be tough on this issue, and I am not for turning on it.

Mr FENLON: Page 2-8 of the MPS says that \$0.4 million will be provided to continue the alcohol restrictions advertising and awareness campaign. Could you please inform the committee as to the success of stage 1 of that initiative and what is planned for the strategy this financial year?

Mr MICKEL: The three-year Meeting Challenges, Making Choices communication strategy aims to make not only residents but also travellers—because we are finding a lot of travellers now coming through the cape, as they see it as a holiday destination—aware of alcohol restrictions in a number of Indigenous communities. It started in January this year. Stage 1 included advertising in major newspapers in Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne and just as importantly in the travel, fishing and boating publications. Just after advertising started, the government launched an Indigenous web site portal located on the Queensland government's main web site at www.qld.gov.au/indigenous/. Since the launch and up until 30 June 2005, there have been, I am advised, 3,556 visits to the portal. Visits to the linked www.alcohollimits.qld.gov.au site have also been very high, with more than 7,000 visits between February and May.

Since the start of the campaign about 400 people, I am advised, have rung the call centre to find out more information about alcohol restrictions. I think this indicates a high level of interest and awareness created by the campaign. This financial year we will continue with the campaign. Last month I launched stage 2 of the campaign, which includes brochures, detailed maps, stickers and mobiles. These have now been distributed to 500 outlets, I understand, in far-north Queensland for travellers to pick up information before they head to the cape or the gulf. People can pick up the information from roadhouses, bottle shops, petrol stations, information kiosks, tourist offices, car hire outlets, bait and tackle shops and national park information centres. We need to ensure that travellers are well aware of the alcohol restrictions before they enter the communities. These restrictions apply to everyone, and raising awareness of them is another way to ensure that they continue to be effective.

We have extensively consulted with the tourist industry about this campaign and Mr Bill Calderwood, the Chief Executive Officer of Tourism Tropical North Queensland, wrote to congratulate the government on this campaign. He said—

... the consensus... was that all the issues that the industry had raised regarding the AMP information strategy had been addressed and that the proposed information dissemination process and the supporting collateral were excellent.

The letter further states that the program provided the tourist industry with the tools it needed and that it would be built into their marketing activities. I have much pleasure in tabling a copy of that letter, if that would help the committee at all.

Leave granted.

CHAIR: I think we have time for one last question from the member for Gregory before we have a break at 5.30 pm.

Mr JOHNSON: I refer again to the 'Capital Acquisition Statement' on page 2-14 of the MPS and to the \$41 million allocated last year for departmental housing. Minister, this statement indicates that only \$80,000 was actually spent. I would have thought that the supply of departmental housing was a crucial matter. Can you explain why there has been such a dramatic underspend of these funds allocated for this purpose?

Mr MICKEL: The reason for the underspend, I am advised, was that there was a high demand for qualified contractors in the building industry resulting in difficulties in securing labour. You would appreciate that the department, like the rest of society, is not immune to the skilled labour shortage that exists in the construction industry. I understand also that there were extreme weather conditions. I think you will find that throughout the building industry—and if you speak to people in the suburbs they will tell you—it is very hard to get skilled tradesmen, and that would be the reason for that underspend.

Mr JOHNSON: It is a big underspend though—\$80,000 of \$41 million.

Mr MICKEL: It is not that. I will hand over to the director of finance and administration to clarify the amount for you.

Ms O'Neill: The first point that the minister raised, the upsurge in the building industry, has been the main issue. There has been a significant growth in demand for all building industry services and the supply of contractors has just not been available. Indeed, we are not the only agency or organisation to be affected by this. There was \$1 million allocated for departmental houses and the carryover amount is \$920,000 to 2005-06.

Mr MICKEL: I thought the member for Gregory said there was about \$40 million?

Mr JOHNSON: Yes, \$41 million in capital acquisition payments.

Mr MICKEL: Lisa, would you like to clarify the expenditure and the expenditure amounts? That might help the committee.

Ms O'Neill: The capital acquisition statement on page 2-14 of the MPS has a budget of \$4.5 million, which provides for a variety of things not just departmental houses.

Mr MICKEL: The total budget for the property is about four and a half.

CHAIR: That concludes all of the questions which the committee has for DATSIP. So if you want to release any of your ministerial or departmental staff, please do so.

Mr MICKEL: I thank the committee and the honourable member for Gregory in particular for their courtesy. I also thank the departmental staff who have worked long and hard to prepare quality answers that they have given to the committee this afternoon. I want to thank each and every one of them for their tireless efforts over many weeks to prepare us. I will have a special way of thanking them over the next couple of days. I do appreciate their efforts and the efforts of my hardworking staff.

Proceedings suspended from 5.31 pm to 5.50 pm

CHAIR: The committee will now continue its examination of the portfolio of the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy, focusing in this session on Energy issues. Minister, if you wish, you have three minutes for an opening statement.

Mr MICKEL: The government is committed to delivering reliable, cost-competitive and sustainable energy to all Queenslanders. This year the energy sector will set new records in terms of capital works investment and the expansion of the gas industry, confirming Queensland's status as Australia's growth state. The government owned electricity corporations will invest \$2.275 billion in capital works, the bulk of it in regional Queensland. When the Borbidge government was in office, it spent \$590 million on capital works throughout the state each year. About one-fifth of this year's capital works budget is being invested in the Kogan Creek project. When it is commissioned in 2007, the Kogan Creek power station will set new standards in generation and environmental sustainability, producing fewer emissions than conventional coal-fired generators and using 90 per cent less water. Its proximity to the Queensland-New South Wales interconnector also strengthens our position as the nation's generation state. Powerlink Queensland is working through the ACCC regulatory test with a view to augmenting the capacity of that interconnector to allow us to export more power into the national electricity market. Powerlink will also invest \$256.5 million this year on its transition network throughout Queensland.

I am also pleased to inform the committee that Ergon and Energex will invest about twice as much in capital works on the distribution networks as they did two years ago. Energex will spend \$658.8 million on works. Ergon Energy has a record capital expenditure budget of \$673 million, which will be invested throughout Queensland. We are responding to the Somerville report. I want to take this opportunity to thank Ergon Energy and Energex workers for their response to the recent wild weather conditions. It was a terrific effort. I want to also congratulate Ergon Energy on recently winning a communications award. The National Customer Contact Centre in Rockhampton was judged the best centre in Queensland in the category for centres with more than 120 seats. The second prize at the Australian Teleservices Awards was taken by Energex.

As you would be aware, communications were identified as a priority area in the Somerville report. I am also pleased to report that Queensland's 13 per cent gas scheme is driving gas-on-gas competition in this state. As a result of this scheme, over 1,500 megawatts of new gas-fired generation is under consideration including Origin's proposed Spring Gully Power Station near Roma. The beneficiaries of this project will be industry, businesses and Queensland families.

The competitive environment has also seen the commercial drivers lining up for the PNG gas pipeline. The pieces are falling into place for this project, which is of national significance. Not only will we need to satisfy demand for gas, which is growing at five per cent a year in Queensland, but also market demand across south-eastern Australia. We are securing Queensland's future by planning for future growth, investing in infrastructure and attracting private sector investment in Queensland's energy sector.

CHAIR: I now call the honourable member for Callide.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, I refer you to page 1 of the MPS, where listed under 2005-06 highlights the last dot point mentions the establishment of 'a robust reporting and monitoring regime' in accordance with the recommendations of the Somerville report. Minister, you will no doubt remember that the Auditor-General was extremely critical of the internal auditing standards within Energex, especially in relation to the payments that were made to Mr Greg Maddock. What have you done in regard to the internal auditing processes within Energex to ensure that the Auditor-General's concerns are addressed and that the situation that arose with Mr Maddock is not repeated?

Mr MICKEL: In answer to your question, I think the first part related to the Somerville report.

Mr SEENEY: No, it did not. Do not make a mockery of the place by reading a briefing note about the Somerville report. The question was about your internal auditing standards within Energex.

CHAIR: The minister is entitled to answer the question.

Mr MICKEL: Mr Chairman, could I invite the committee to look at the dot point that the honourable member is referring to? I will read out the dot point. It states—

As highlighted in the *Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery for the 21st Century* (the 'Somerville Report'), a robust reporting and monitoring regime will be established to ensure Queensland energy sector participants are operating in accordance with required standards.

These are standards for distribution and service delivery. Accordingly, that is what is in the report and that is why I will answer the question in this way, if that is all right with you, Mr Chairman. My department has committed significant resources to the monitoring of the implementation of the 44 recommendations of the independent panel reviewing electricity distribution and service delivery. Currently, 16 of the 44 recommendations have been fully implemented by Energex, Ergon Energy, the government and the Queensland Competition Authority. A further nine recommendations are on schedule for completion over the next 18 months. The remaining 19 are long-term recommendations, where the key actions have been implemented but ongoing monitoring and continual improvements through the network management plan framework are required. The government and the department are committed to taking all steps necessary to deliver reliable electricity supply to Queenslanders and to continue to work closely with the distribution entities to address the issues identified in the EDSD report.

The honourable member asked specifically about monitoring. The department has been monitoring the performance of Energex and Ergon Energy on a monthly basis. Monthly reports from the distributors cover a number of key performance indicators, including capital and operational expenditure, network performance including key reliability and quality of supply indicators, network capacity increases, guaranteed service levels and associated customer rebates, vegetation management activities, causes of interruptions to supply, network inspections and call centre performance.

Energex and Ergon Energy were required to develop and publish summer preparedness plans for 2004-05. The summer preparedness plans outlined actions to be completed prior to the summer storm and peak load period to ensure continuity of supply to customers, responsiveness to outage and communications with customers. The summer preparedness plans were successfully implemented, audited and reported on in accordance with the electricity industry code. Energex and Ergon Energy have been asked to produce new summer preparedness plans for the 2005-06 summer. These plans are due to be finalised and submitted to the regulator by 31 August 2005.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, now that you have read the briefing note that had nothing to do with the question that I asked, could you not treat the committee with contempt and answer the question? The Auditor-General was extremely critical of the internal auditing standards especially in relation to the payments that were made to Mr Greg Maddock. What changes have you put in place to satisfy the concerns that the Auditor-General raised to ensure that we will not see a repeat of the tragic circumstances surrounding the payments that were made to Mr Greg Maddock?

Mr MICKEL: I take offence at the insinuation that I did not answer the question. The honourable member referred to page 1-1 of the MPS, and I specifically read it out to the committee. Accordingly, I would ask your protection against what was an attack on me. He did not ask that question at all.

Mr SEENEY: I have asked it now.

Mr MICKEL: I would ask you to refer to where that is in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. What number? Why must you persist in misleading the committee? What Ministerial Portfolio Statement? I will be happy to answer it as long as it is before me and before this committee for examination in this year's budget.

CHAIR: The minister is quite correct. We are here to examine the expenditure in the MPS and that is what we will be directed to.

Mr SEENEY: We certainly are.

CHAIR: If you continue to try to divert into broader areas, we will simply move on to another question.

Mr SEENEY: So you believe that the internal auditing standards within Energex are not the subject of this committee, Minister? You believe that the internal auditing standards of Energex are not what the Somerville report was referring to when it talked about reporting and monitoring regimes?

Mr MICKEL: I know that the honourable member gets confused about these things. We try our best with him all the time. Mr Chairman, the Somerville report dealt with the distribution companies. I am happy to answer the honourable member's question if he simply points to a Ministerial Portfolio Statement under which I can answer that question. Why won't he do that?

Mr SEENEY: I believe it does fall under a Ministerial Portfolio Statement that refers to reporting and monitoring regimes. Internal auditing of the biggest GOC within your portfolio is certainly something that falls under a monitoring regime surely.

Mr MICKEL: It is a monitoring regime for the distribution companies. Mr Chairman, I have answered the question. The Maddock matter was a matter for Treasury. If you go back and read *Hansard* and you see the honourable member's attacks on Treasury officials, he knows that as well as anybody else does. I am happy to answer the questions on the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, but the question he asked me dealt with the distribution companies. I am happy to read it out again if that is what the honourable member wants. In fact, I have the brief and I will read it again.

The sorts of performance indicators are the capital and operational expenditure; the network performance, including key reliability and quality of supply indicators; network capacity increases; guaranteed service levels and associated customer rebates; vegetation management activities; causes of interruptions to supply; network inspection; and call centre performances. Again, I will inform the committee that one of the other activities that Somerville asked us to do was to have a look at the summer preparedness plans for last summer, the outlined actions to be completed prior to the summer storm and peak load period to ensure continuity of supply to customers, responsiveness to outages, and communications with customers. They were successfully implemented, audited and reported on in accordance with the Electricity Industry Code. Both Energex and Ergon have been asked to produce new summer preparedness plans for this summer—the summer of 2005-06. These plans are due to be finalised and submitted to the regulator by 31 August 2005.

Mr SEENEY: The Somerville report independently reviewed the operations of Energex and Ergon. Are you, Minister, seriously suggesting that this committee should accept that a question about an issue that the Auditor-General raised about the internal auditing processes within Energex does not fall within the bounds of your responsibility?

CHAIR: Minister, I am ruling the question out of order. I note that, given that the members for Maroochy, Charters Towers and Gympie have gone home, there is no-one to object to my ruling.

Mr MICKEL: Mr Chairman, if it will help the honourable member, I can give him and supply him with the terms of reference for the Somerville inquiry and he will realise that what he is asking is silly under the ministerial—

Mr SEENEY: Mr Chairman, I accept that the minister is not going to answer the question. Let us move on.

Mr MICKEL: I take a point of order.

Mr SEENEY: I accept that the minister is not going to answer the question. We can assume that no changes have been made, shall we?

Mr MICKEL: I take a point of order on that. He is deliberately trying to badger me. He is misleading the committee in this. I could be uncharitable and say that the member is lying to the committee. Under no circumstances am I doing that. He asked me a question on the Ministerial Portfolio Statement about page 1-1—that is, *Electricity distribution and service delivery for the 21st century*. I am sorry if the honourable member is incapable of understanding that.

CHAIR: The minister has answered the question. Move on to your next question.

Mr SEENEY: I accept, Mr Chairman, that the minister is not going to answer it. Minister, in late January of this year you met—

Mr MICKEL: I take a point of order again, Mr Chairman. Mr Chairman, the *Hansard* will show—or should show—that I have answered the question as I am required to do under the Ministerial Portfolio Statement. Accordingly, I will answer the question again for the benefit of the committee and the honourable member. The honourable member asked me about the *Electricity distribution and service delivery for the 21st century*, and this is what it says in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement—

... (the 'Somerville report'), a robust reporting and monitoring regime will be established to ensure Queensland energy sector participants are operating in accordance with required standards.

As I said to the committee in answering the question in full, my department has committed significant resources to the monitoring of the implementation of the 44 recommendations of the independent panel reviewing electricity distribution and service delivery. Currently, 16 of the 44 recommendations have been fully implemented by Energex, Ergon Energy, the government and the Queensland Competition Authority. A further nine recommendations are on schedule for completion over the next 18 months. The remaining 19 are long-term recommendations where the key actions have been implemented, but ongoing monitoring and continual improvements through the network management plan framework are required. The government and the department are committed to taking all steps necessary to deliver a reliable electricity supply to Queenslanders and to continue to work closely with the distribution entities to address the issues identified in the EDSD report.

I will deal with the monitoring, because that seems to be at the heart of what the honourable member is on about. The department has been monitoring the performance of Energex and Ergon Energy on a monthly basis. Let me repeat what the monthly reports from the distributors and their key indicators include. They include the capital and operational expenditure; network performance, including key reliability and quality of supply indicators; network capacity increases; guaranteed service levels and associated customer rebates; vegetation management activities; causes of interruptions to supply; network inspections; and call centre performance.

Again, just to highlight again for the committee my full answer on this, on summer preparedness they were required—that is, Energex and Ergon Energy—to develop and publish summer preparedness plans for the 2004-05 summer. The summer preparedness plans outlined actions to be completed prior to the summer storm and peak load period to ensure continuity of supply to customers, responsiveness to outages and communications with customers. Those plans were successfully implemented, audited and reported on in accordance with the Electricity Industry Code. Ergon and Energex have been asked to produce new summer preparedness plans for this summer. They will be finalised.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, you said that you were monitoring the performance of Energex on a monthly basis. Did you seek from the CEO of Energex any response to the Auditor-General's criticism of its internal auditing standards?

Mr MICKEL: What is the MPS page number please?

Mr SEENEY: Okay. There are a whole range of MPS dot points—

Mr MICKEL: I just want simply one to give my advisers half a chance.

Mr SEENEY: On page 1-1 the MPS says that the department operates in several key areas, one of which is an energy policy—that is, developing and managing the strategic policy. There are a whole range of references to monitoring and administering the activities of Energex and Ergon. Are you seriously suggesting that your department does not have a responsibility to monitor these GOCs?

Mr MICKEL: I will ask my director-general to answer the question.

Mr Flavell: The monitoring you are referring to as a consequence of the EDSR report is the monitoring of the performance of the distribution system—that is, technical monitoring of the performance of the distribution system, service standards and reliability factors. That is what is actually referred to in the Somerville report. The item that you are referring to relates to those specific activities. Broader monitoring in terms of GOC monitoring is a separate activity which is conducted by the Office of Government Owned Corporations in Queensland Treasury.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in January this year you met with the Energex chairman to discuss the \$43,000 in funeral expenses for the CEO of Energex and specifically whether those expenses were deducted as part of the settlement reached with the Maddock family on Christmas Eve last year. Minister, can you tell the committee whether those funeral expenses were deducted from the payment that was made to the Maddock family?

Mr MICKEL: Mr Chairman, I know he continues to defy you. I am simply asking not for any special favours. Would you refer to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement where this comes under this year's budget?

CHAIR: Order! I need to make a couple of things clear apparently, member for Callide. You are here as a guest of the committee, and that invitation can be withdrawn at any time. I also note that there are no non-government members elected to this committee present here tonight. I invite you to ask relevant questions relevant to this year's MPS, otherwise I propose to simply rule them out of order. I note that there is nobody here to challenge such a ruling in circumstances where the non-government members of this committee have chosen to absent themselves. That question is out of order. Next question.

Mr SEENEY: Can you clarify for me, Mr Chairman, to save me asking a whole series of questions that you may rule out of order, that all questions I may have in relation to the operations of Energex will be ruled out of order?

CHAIR: Of course not; no. If you can identify in the MPS particular expenditures or policies or determinations, then by all means ask away. I would suggest that they are more likely to be questions relating to the future than the past, though.

Mr SEENEY: Okay. Minister, I note in relation to the questions on notice—which you did respond to when we asked them on notice, so I hope that you will be good enough to respond to them before the committee—that you refused to provide details on the rebates that have been paid to Queenslanders under the Guaranteed Service Level Scheme because you chose to make a differentiation between the word 'compensation' and 'rebate'. Will you provide the committee with the number of applications received, the number rejected and the number approved for the rebate payments that have been made under that supply guarantee scheme?

Mr MICKEL: I answer the question by simply saying this: if you look at the questions on notice, they referred to the GSLs as compensation. That is wrong. I am surprised that you as opposition spokesman did not know that, because you supported the legislation in the parliament. I suppose it should not come as any surprise to me, because you asked for a briefing on network limitations for our retailers and all they do is sell electricity. But I will come to this and answer your question in this way.

It is important, as I said, to clarify the Guaranteed Service Level Scheme and associated rebates about requiring the electricity distributors, Energex and Ergon Energy, to recognise their customer service obligations and give financial obligations to customers where they fail to meet those obligations. In this context, it is important to note that the Guaranteed Service Level Scheme does not remove or alter any existing legal rights a customer may have to pursue compensation for loss or damage as a result of a failure in relation to their electricity supply. Neither is payment of a rebate an admission of liability on the part of the distribution entity. Secondly, while the guaranteed service level rebates paid appear as a credit on the customer's electricity account from the Energex or Ergon Energy retail entities, the retail entities are in fact passing on the rebate to the customer on behalf of the distribution entities to whom the guaranteed service levels apply. In relation to the number and value of guaranteed service level rebates paid since 1 January 2005—

CHAIR: You have two minutes.

Mr MICKEL: In relation to the number and value of guaranteed service level rebates for the period 1 January to 30 June 2005, Energex paid a total of 132 rebates.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time for that block of non-government questions has expired. Minister, I refer you to page 1-6 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement which mentions the Energy Consumer Protection Office, or ECPO. Minister, could you advise what assistance ECPO offers to customers, how many inquiries it has dealt with in the past financial year, how many cases are resolved

without proceeding to formal arbitration or mediation, and how ECPO's performance compares with interstate agencies?

Mr MICKEL: This is an outstanding reform of the Beattie government. The Energy Consumer Protection Office was established in October 2000 as the primary dispute resolution service for energy consumers in Queensland. The ECPO model was trialled for 12 months and an independent valuation was undertaken of the ECPO model prior to the government making a final decision on the preferred model for dispute resolution in Queensland. As a result of the trial and the independent evaluation, parliament passed the Electricity Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act 2001 that provided for the repealing of the electricity industry ombudsman provisions of the Electricity Act 1994 and established ECPO as the model for dispute resolution in Queensland.

ECPO provides free, fair, independent and confidential frontline complaint investigation and dispute resolution services to any of Queensland's 1.7 million domestic and small business electricity customers and 160,000 reticulated gas customers who have been unable to resolve an issue with their energy supplier. I am advised that in 2004-05, ECPO dealt with 1,689 electricity and gas customer issues. This compares with 1,586 issues being dealt with by ECPO in 2003-04. Since its establishment, ECPO has dealt with over 7,200 electricity and gas customer issues relating to matters that include high accounts, interruptions to supply, disconnection of supply, claims for damages caused by supply interruptions, extensions of supply, vegetation management and call centre complaints.

The ECPO scheme utilises a four-stage process of dispute resolution. Inquiry, referral, investigation stage, formal mediation and formal arbitration. The final two stages of the dispute resolution process enable the customer to make an application to the regulator—who is the director-general—to refer a dispute to an independent energy mediator or energy arbitrator. There are 28 energy mediators and 14 energy arbitrators appointed to respective panels on a fee-for-service basis only. Energy arbitrators have the power to make binding decisions on electricity and gas entities of up to \$20,000 or non-monetary orders against the entity to remedy any issue in the dispute.

ECPO is also responsible for identifying, investigating, reporting and providing feedback to the government and the energy sector on systemic consumer issues involving the performance of energy sector entities. ECPO has achieved significant outcomes for many energy consumers, ranging from substantial compensation payouts to organising payment plans for energy customers who face the threat of disconnection.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 1-1 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement states that the Energy Consumer Protection Office will establish regional offices in Cairns and Rockhampton. Could you advise when those offices will be operational and how those offices will benefit energy customers in regional Queensland?

Mr MICKEL: It is true to say that in the past ECPO's services have been delivered through the statewide office located in George Street. This has resulted in electricity and gas consumers in south-east Queensland having greater access to these services compared to those consumers who live in regional Queensland. A key priority for this government and for this ministry is to improve government services to regional Queensland.

To better align ECPO services to meet the needs of regional Queensland, I have established two additional ECPO regional offices. One will be established in Rockhampton and the other in Cairns. Both regional offices commenced operations on 11 July 2005. The regional offices will enable ECPO to be more responsive to the local needs of electricity and gas consumers in regional Queensland.

The central Queensland and far-north Queensland regional offices will also be responsible for identifying, investigating, reporting and providing feedback to the government and the energy sector on systemic consumer issues involving the performance of electricity and gas entities in those regional areas. As with ECPO's south Queensland regional office, the central and far-northern Queensland regional offices will not merely be call centres. Where necessary, investigative officers will have the capacity to travel throughout the area to undertake site visits for investigation and formal mediation purposes with customers and industry representatives. In cases where a satisfactory resolution between the parties cannot be reached, consumers also have the option to make application for formal independent mediation or arbitration.

Regardless of where energy consumers in the state live, we have made contacting ECPO simple and inexpensive. By calling 1300 300 993, consumers living in far-north Queensland will deal directly with the far-north Queensland regional office, consumers living in central Queensland will deal directly with the central Queensland regional office, and consumers living in the south-east corner will deal with the south Queensland regional office—all for the cost of a local call. Consumers can also visit in person, write, fax, email or use ECPO's online complaint form.

ECPO is now the most accessible statewide energy dispute resolution scheme in Australia. From 1 July 2005, ECPO's contact details appear on an entity's final disconnection notice, guaranteed service level rejection letter and compensation claim rejection letter. With this exposure, together with an

increased consumer awareness, I am confident that ECPO and its new regional offices will ensure that energy customers throughout the state have a voice and are heard.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 1-6 of your MPS refers to developing a new energy policy to ensure the continued delivery of reliable, cost-competitive energy. What is the Queensland government's policy on undergrounding electricity lines?

Mr MICKEL: The benefits of undergrounding power lines include increased safety, improved protection from physical damage, reduced maintenance and vegetation management costs, enhanced visual amenity and causing fewer fires. I point out to the committee that the federal government's 1998 'report on the putting cables underground working group' stated that 'underground cables outperform overhead lines by an average of three to one in terms of frequency of outages' for low voltage lines. Impediments to the undergrounding of power lines include cost, clearing of vegetation and duration of outages. The 1998 report also stated that 'restoration for an overhead line fault averaged four hours, while the repair time for an underground cable fault could be up to 24 hours for low voltage lines'. This reflects the increased difficulty in pinpointing the location of, and complexity of rectifying, underground faults.

Undergrounding has widespread public appeal because of its benefits but costs much more than overhead construction—two to 15 times more, I am advised, depending on voltage and other factors. I am advised that the cost of undergrounding all of Queensland's existing overhead power lines, including high voltage transmission lines, has been estimated at \$56 billion. I am advised that undergrounding in all city and urban areas would cost about \$5 billion. That is based on an average retrofitting cost of \$5,600 per residence.

Quantifiable benefits of undergrounding existing overhead power lines usually do not compensate for their increased capital cost. A New South Wales feasibility study found that 'the cost of undergrounding outweighs the quantifiable benefits by 300 per cent to 400 per cent'. The Queensland government does not directly contribute to the cost of undergrounding existing overhead power lines. Other areas—for example, health, education, police—are considered to be of more benefit to the community.

Energex and Ergon Energy offer limited support—a third to half of the cost—to undergrounding projects which form part of local government or Department of Main Roads improvements. Energex and Ergon Energy budget a total of \$4.5 million per annum for these undergrounding projects. Additionally, Ergon Energy has allocated \$6 million per annum over 20 years for its Cyclone Area Reliability Enhancement Scheme, which utilises undergrounding of supply particularly to critical customers such as hospitals, water supply, sewerage and emergency services facilities.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-5 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement states that the 13 per cent gas scheme has provided a major boost to the coal seam gas industry. Could you advise how much funding has been spent by the Department of Energy, either directly or in conjunction with the department of state development, to boost this industry and what the outcome of that support has been?

Mr MICKEL: It is a 13 per cent gas scheme supported by the government but opposed by the National Party. It has produced, as you would have seen in the business pages of this week's *Courier-Mail*, an outstanding boost in investment in the gas industry. The scheme commenced on 1 January 2005 and has had a profound influence on the development of gas-fired electricity generation in Queensland. Gas-fired generation has the benefit of diversification of Queensland's electricity supply sources—less greenhouse intensive than the current generation of coal-fired generators.

Since the announcement of the 13 per cent gas scheme as part of the Queensland energy policy—that is, the cleaner energy strategy of May 2000—I am advised that three new gas-fired power stations have commenced operation totalling 617 megawatts. I am advised that a further 450 megawatts of gas-fired generation has been committed. I am also advised that more than 1,500 megawatts of additional capacity is being considered.

In association with this expansion, but not solely due to it, the level of activity and commitment in the exploration for, and production of, coal seam gas has increased markedly. From the production of two petajoules of coal seam gas per annum in 2000, the industry is now estimated to be producing in excess of 65 petajoules per annum. The number of participants in the industry has also increased from two to nine, with two more to commence production, I am advised, in 2005-06. All of this has been achieved without government-supporting expenditure.

The introduction of the 13 per cent gas scheme has provided a base demand for gas which, in the context of the gas resources of Queensland, has enabled a boost to the coal seam gas industry and enabled it to move into direct competition to supply industrial customers as well as electricity generators. Queensland coal seam gas has also provided a large part of a contract with a major southern gas supplier, replacing, in part, conventional natural gas contracts from declining fields.

CHAIR: Minister, page 1-5 of the MPS notes that the 13 per cent gas scheme is intended to diversify Queensland's energy mix towards the greater use of gas. I was wondering if you could elaborate a little on the impact of this on gas-on-gas competition in the development of Queensland's gas industry?

Mr MICKEL: As I said, the 13 per cent gas scheme has been welcomed and is an important part of the energy mix. The government energy policy now delivers 85 per cent coal, 13 per cent gas and two per cent renewable. So the 13 per cent gas scheme is part of that strategy. As I said, it is part of the strategy because it is more greenhouse intensive.

You asked particularly about investment. I am advised that since the announcement of the scheme in May 2000 three new gas-fired power stations have commenced operation and they total 617 megawatts. I am also advised that a further 450 megawatts of gas-fired generation has been committed. More than 1,500 megawatts of additional capacity is being considered.

I point out for the benefit of the honourable member something that is current. You would have seen that the major player, Santos, has recently purchased the Tipperary fields. Equally, I draw honourable members' attention to the *Courier-Mail* of 11 July, where you can see the huge mark-up in gas exploration, gas companies and gas activities. Most of the jobs for that in the exploration field are in National Party electorates, which is why I could not understand the National Party's opposition to it. Nevertheless, there you go.

The growth of the industry has been remarkable—production of two petajoules of coal seam gas per annum in 2000. The industry is now estimated to be producing in excess of 65 petajoules per annum. The number of participants has increased from two to nine and, I am advised, two more are to commence production in 2005-06.

Expansion is taking place from a state with one major gas source—originally we had one major gas source—in the south-west Queensland gas fields; now we have many sources of it. It has had the impact of increasing the availability of gas for industry and electricity generation and has maintained downward pressure on gas prices with clear benefits for the Queensland economy. Existing industries have now been able to secure new long-term contracts which ensure their continued economic prosperity and others have been able to convert from more expensive liquid fuels to gas for use in their industrial processes. As I said in my opening statement, it seems it has been an important economic driver of late in the renewed announcements and activities for the PNG gas pipeline.

Mr FENLON: Page 1-5 of the MPS refers to the recommendations of the Somerville report. One of these recommendations was the review of provision of electricity to consumers serviced by SWER lines in regional Queensland. Could you please advise whether this review has been conducted and, if so, what are its findings?

Mr MICKEL: It is a good question. I know from your time out in central Queensland you would understand why SWER lines were so important to people in those parts of Queensland. As you correctly say, the Electricity Distribution Service Delivery report recommended that—

The government and Ergon Energy establish a joint task force to consider options for improving the reliability of supply in areas serviced by SWER lines.

The task force, formed in late 2004, has identified a number of issues and options to improve the quality and reliability of the electricity supply on SWER lines over the next several years. The task force findings and recommended courses of action are being presented to the Cabinet Budget Review Committee shortly and have been factored into Ergon Energy's plans for the development, operation and maintenance of its distribution network. Ergon Energy and the task force will undertake consultation on the initial outcomes of the review with the regional electricity councils and local government representatives following CBRC consideration.

The Queensland Competition Authority, in its April 2005 determination on Ergon Energy's revenue cap, allowed for \$178 million in expenditure on the SWER system over the five-year regulatory period. The options identified by the task force include capital investment in the upstream network—this will encompass significant capital and operating investment on the rural feeders which supply the SWER network. Improvements flowing from this investment are expected to be reflected in improved performance of the SWER network. This capital investment in the SWER network—the Queensland Competition Authority has approved \$178 million over the next five years for investment in Ergon Energy's SWER network—is the first time Ergon Energy has had an investment program specific to the SWER network. Priority will be given to those SWER lines which serve large customer bases, which are currently experiencing unacceptable levels of supply reliability for extended periods.

Ergon Energy will also report back by 30 June 2006 on the results of its investigations into the following additional options: distributed or embedded generation opportunities, both renewable and fossil fuelled, which might provide network support and enhance energy delivery to customers; customer initiatives—a small number of customers might desire a higher quality of supply than the SWER network can, by its nature, provide. Ergon Energy will examine possible arrangements for meeting such additional requirements through the deployment of additional technology at the customer's premises. However, customers may need to contribute towards the cost of such further improvement of their supply reliability and quality by purchasing inexpensive auxiliary appliances such as uninterruptible power systems and voltage regulators or by participating in demand side management programs.

Mr FENLON: Page 1-7 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to key performance and reliability indicators for Energex and Ergon Energy. How will Energex and Ergon Energy's vegetation management programs improve performance and reliability of the electricity network?

Mr MICKEL: Electricity distributors must take steps to manage vegetation adjacent to their supply networks because of the risk of both electrical and mechanical damage to the network and disruption to supply when vegetation comes into contact with the system. The potential problems, frequently but not always associated with storms, include branches falling on to the lines and bringing them down and branches and debris being blown in the wires and causing short-circuits which may cause interruptions to supply through protection system operators or through failure of the conductors at the point of fault. To manage these risks, distributors such as Energex and Ergon Energy seek to maintain a safe clearance of vegetation from their overhead lines in particular. This requirement must be met with due regard to the environmental implications of vegetation removal or trimming and the desire of consumers and local authorities in urban areas to maintain a leafy environment.

The question of vegetation management was considered by the Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery for the 21st century review, the Somerville review. It found that there had been inadequate expenditure and maintenance, including vegetation management, by Energex in particular. In response to this finding and their own assessments of the necessary levels of vegetation management activity, the two distributors have embarked on increased programs to ensure that vegetation related supply outages are reduced. Energex increased its 2004-05 vegetation management expenditure to \$46.4 million from approximately \$25 million in each of the previous two years. This allocation will be increased to \$50 million in 2005-06 reflecting a transition from a reactive approach to a comprehensive cyclical maintenance program.

Ergon Energy has made a \$79 million allocation for 2005-06—which is a 30 per cent increase on its 2003-04 expenditure on vegetation management—to catch up on a backlog of clearing and trimming work. It will then establish appropriate clearing cycles for its different regions to maintain an appropriate level of protection against vegetation induced outages. Ergon Energy's approach will be based on an annual cycle for urban portions of the network and a three-year cycle for rural feeders.

CHAIR: It is time for another block of non-government questions.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can I refer you again to the Electricity Industry Code which prescribed guaranteed service levels, and just so there is no dispute I will refer you to page 1-5 of the MPS where it says—

Non-contestable customers of Energex and Ergon will receive rebates on their electricity bill if they do not receive the specified level of customer service.

It is the same issue that I asked you about in the last question before the break and I thank you for the extensive background material that you supplied in answer to that question. However, could you now provide the committee with two numbers: firstly the number of customers who have received a rebate and, secondly, the amount of money that has been paid or credited to electricity customers on their accounts in the form of rebate? Two numbers is all I am after.

Mr MICKEL: I thought—if I am not correct I would like to see the *Hansard*—that I was in the process of giving numbers when my time had run out. I thought I had given one number at the very least. I am happy to do that. In relation to the number of guaranteed service level rebate claims since 1 January 2005, for the period of 1 January to 30 June 2005 the number of rebate claims received is Energex 160—I think I gave that figure—and Ergon Energy 201 rebate claims.

Mr SEENEY: How much money was paid in rebates or credited to customers' accounts in the form of rebates?

Mr MICKEL: For the rebate claims for 1 January 2005 to 30 June 2005, I am advised that for Ergon Energy the amount was \$8,990 and for Energex it was \$9,240.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you, Minister. I was interested in your comments about the gas-fired electricity issue and it is referred to a number of times in the MPS. Minister, you will recall that in about 1999, I think it was, there was extensive debate in the parliament about 'take or pay' contracts that Energex and Ergon were entering into with the operators or the proposed operators of the Papua New Guinea pipeline. Do Energex and Ergon still have commitments to that project or have those 'take or pay' contracts lost validity with time?

Mr MICKEL: I do not want to be provocative, but if you were engaged in the debate in 1999 then you would have known that Ergon does not have any gas contracts and that is still the case. I do not know what you have been doing for the last little while you have been the energy spokesman. I noticed in the debate last year you poured scorn on the Papua New Guinea gas pipeline project, just as you opposed the 13 per cent gas project. Rather than me divulge where Energex are up to, I will say this as a preamble, that any contract entered into with Exxon or any other company will be done on a commercial basis, one that is in the interests of the Queensland taxpayers and the Queensland consumers.

If it is okay with the committee, I would like to ask the acting CEO of Energex, Dr Kremor, to come up and explain where we are up to. Did you get the question?

Dr Kremor: The question was the situation with potential 'take or pay' contracts with PNG gas. You will appreciate that any discussions that we are having are subject to confidentiality with both parties.

Mr SEENEY: Absolutely.

Dr Kremor: But I think it is public knowledge that we are in discussions with PNG gas but no binding agreements are in place at this time.

Mr SEENEY: Thank you. Simple enough. Thanks very much. In regard to the Townsville Power Station, can you give any indication of the amount of public money that the government provided to that project to get it up and running, quite apart from what was invested by the operators?

Mr MICKEL: I firstly want to say this of the Townsville project: I notice you have been running around the place saying you want a coal-fired power station in Townsville and then you said you would accept one anywhere in north Queensland. I simply want to say this to you and the committee for the benefit of anybody: if you have somebody—

Mr SEENEY: Can I clarify that I said we needed a large base load power station in Townsville. I am not sure I said a coal-fired power station. Anyway, do not let me interrupt you.

Mr MICKEL: If you believe that a coal-fired power station is the answer and you have got some proponent in there who reckons they can do it on a commercial basis, ask them to come and see my director-general tomorrow and we will issue the licence. That is my opening statement on power for Townsville. There has been comment about the gas-fired base load power station in or near Townsville. The government recognises that an achievement of that objective would require a number of difficult outcomes. A reliable and economic source of gas would need to be identified and appropriate commercial commitments achieved with a gas supplier, a gas pipeline would need to be constructed from the source of the gas or a point on an existing pipeline to transport gas to Townsville and a gas-fired power station would need to be developed at Townsville. All of these developments would need to be achieved at an acceptable cost.

The government accepted that, on a simple comparison with the delivery of electricity to Townsville from a coal-fired generator in central Queensland, a Townsville gas-fired power station may not be commercially viable. Accordingly, the government structured the competitive process so as to identify any support proposed projects required and to select the preferred development on the basis of the minimisation of the required support, all else being equal. The preferred development selected was one organised by Enertrade, based on coal seam gas supply from a new field at Moranbah, a new gas pipeline from Moranbah to Townsville and conversion of Transfield's Yabulu gas turbine power station from a ridiculous concept left to us by the Borbidge government of a peaking station run, would you believe, on avgas to a 220 megawatt gas-fired combined cycle operation. Notably, this combination brought about significant developments in the coal seam gas industry in Queensland and gas in Townsville, representing the first major coal seam gas contract where the purchaser was wholly dependant on the success of CSG production for its physical supply of gas and the development of a high capacity gas pipeline to Townsville providing the prospect of gas based industrial developments in Townsville to replace high-cost liquid fuels.

It also delivered the desired base load power station in Townsville. Moreover, it was able to do this on the basis of a commercial pipeline development which required no additional facilitation and which has been shown to be commercial by the development of further large gas transportation arrangements with Townsville industry. As foreseen, there was a requirement for facilitation of the power station part of the project as the power station is required to operate in a market dominated by lower cost coal-fired generators.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, can I refer back to non-government question on notice No. 7 regarding Powerlink's annual planning report and the potential network augmentation that Powerlink has identified. The answer that you gave seems to indicate that there has been only one project completed to date. Can you supply the committee with details as to when the other critical network augmentations are going to take place? Are they happening or is the process way behind?

Mr MICKEL: I am going to ask Simon to come up. I notice the opposition was critical of us having an annual planning report. There has been an annual planning report for a number of years. It shows what the requirements are in the future and yet the opposition could not understand the need for an annual planning report. Any business would have an annual planning report to show where it should improve. We have one in the electricity industry. You would wonder why an opposition would find fault with that.

We have an expert Powerlink program. I am disappointed, I have to tell the committee, that the Powerlink project for far-north Queensland, which has been under investigation for a number of years, is still being held up because the federal government took 14 months to make a decision on the

environment—to take the project out of a Wet Tropics area and run it along the coast. It took 14 months to make a decision which should have taken 14 weeks. I am advised that they still want us to go back for a further round of consultation. When you have a look at the constraints that have been put in our way in far-north Queensland, the window of opportunity for particularly Mission Beach and El Arish is closing. I will ask Simon to come up and brief the committee on how we are going with Powerlink.

Mr Bartlett: I understand the question is that, looking at the 2004 annual planning report, what projects have since been completed.

Mr SEENEY: In the minister's answer only one is showing as completed.

Mr Bartlett: A transmission project typically takes about two years from approval to completion. A planning report sets in place the plans for projects to be undertaken from that time onwards.

Mr SEENEY: I apologise if you do not have the minister's answer.

Mr Bartlett: I can list the projects which have been commenced and their completion dates, if you would like.

Mr SEENEY: That will be good.

CHAIR: I would like to hear the answer.

Mr Bartlett: In terms of supply to the Blackwater-Moura area, I point out that the Blackwater transformer project commenced in June 2004, will cost \$5.6 million and the completion date is October 2006. For supply to the south-east Queensland area, the capacitor banks at Loganlea substation commenced in August 2004 and will be completed September 2006. The capacitor bank at Runcorn commenced in August 2004 and is to be completed in October 2005. The capacitor banks at Rocklea substation commenced August 2004 and are to be completed in October 2005. The capacitor bank at Palmwoods substation commenced in August and is to be completed in October 2006.

For supply to the south-west Brisbane area, there will be 110 33kV brand-new substations. The Algester substation was commenced in January 2005 at a cost \$13.5 million. Goodna substation commenced in January 2005 at a cost of \$17.1 million. Sumner Park substation was commenced in January 2005 at a cost \$7.2 million. They are all to be completed by October 2006.

For supply to the Gold Coast area, we have entered into contracts for network support with DirectLink to take effect this summer. We have also commenced construction of a new 275 substation at Greenbank.

CHAIR: Can we allow a further two minutes to hear the answer?

Mr SEENEY: That is fine.

Mr Bartlett: Work on a new transmission line between Greenbank and Maudsland commenced in July 2004 at a total cost of \$50 million. Works are to be completed by October 2006.

Mr SEENEY: The \$80 million that is shown in the capital statement as the north Queensland transmission reinforcement, is that for the line that the minister referred to to replace the one through the Wet Tropics area or is it an augmentation of the supply to north Queensland?

Mr MICKEL: What reference are we on?

Mr SEENEY: It is listed under capital works on page 66. It is an amount of \$80 million. Does it increase the power of supply to north Queensland or is it simply to replace that piece of line that runs through the Wet Tropics?

Mr Bartlett: I need a little bit more information on where you getting the reference to \$80 million.

Mr SEENEY: It is under Powerlink's capital expenditure.

Mr Bartlett: Maybe if I can explain two planned projects for north Queensland.

Mr SEENEY: That will be good.

Mr Bartlett: On the one hand you have referred to works in the far-north Queensland area to replace the aged transmission lines in the Kareeya to Innisfail area to ensure future reliability of supply to the Cairns and El Arish areas. The total cost of works which will be required over a five-year period will be \$110 million. Some of that may be in the time frame in that report.

We are currently looking at works to ensure the reliability of supply to the Townsville north area. We are looking at options there. One option is to purchase grid support from existing generators. Another option is to strengthen the existing transmission network between central Queensland and north Queensland—the Townsville area. The estimated cost of that would be about \$60 million. The decision on which option to proceed with is part of a current planning study. The outcome of that will be known within the next few months.

Mr SEENEY: So none of that \$80 million is actually for the specific purpose of increasing the power availability in north Queensland? You are still planning that.

CHAIR: For the benefit of the committee can you give the page number.

Mr SEENEY: Page 66. Do not worry about it. I am happy with the answer that you gave. We will move on because we are fast running out of time. Minister, in the figures in the capital works budget for the GOC expenditures on page 62 there is a whole range of expenditures that would appear to me to be paid for by the beneficiaries of those expenditures. Can you clarify that the expenditures that are listed there—for example, the \$40 million in the central Queensland region of which you say \$16 million is for the Central Queensland Port Authority, the major expenditure for the Rolleston coalmine and another major expenditure for a mine in Dalrymple shire—are being met by the GOCs or by the beneficiaries of that supply?

Mr MICKEL: If it is okay with the committee I will get the CEO of Ergon Energy, Tony Bellas, to answer that.

Mr Bellas: The expenditures you refer to are of a capital nature. The beneficiaries of those projects often make contributions under our contribution policy. It is a formulated policy under which they make those contributions. The bulk of the expenditure would be borne by ourselves, with a partial contribution from the beneficiary. So there are works currently in place for the Central Queensland Port Authority associated with the expansion of the port. That involves a new bulk supply substation adjacent to the power station, a new zone substation at the port and a new 66 kV line which links to the port. That would be subject to that contribution policy.

Mr SEENEY: Minister, in the case of those capital expenditures, is the contribution policy a standard thing or is it negotiated individually for each particular project?

Mr Bellas: The contributions are negotiated, but there is a standard contribution policy which applies.

Mr SEENEY: Are you able to tell me what the standard contribution policy is?

Mr Bellas: It relates back to an estimate of the revenue that will be received from the project. There is a formula which relates back to the revenue we expect to receive. Any shortfall is then borne by the proponent.

CHAIR: The time for the block of non-government questions has expired. Minister, we have a slight left field issue that has arisen. The electronic media who normally would have been here to take some silent footage during the opening statement are here now and have requested consent to do that. The committee is proposing to allow that to happen over the next three minutes. I seek a motion from the committee that television file footage without sound be permitted for the following three minutes.

Mr O'BRIEN: I so move.

CHAIR: The cameras will be here for a few minutes with the sound off.

Mr WILSON: The MPS at page 1-6 refers to participating in the development of a national electricity market. Could you describe how Queensland's decision to join the national electricity market will benefit customers? What further reforms are you proposing?

Mr MICKEL: This is a very important question which goes to the heart of what our department is trying to achieve in making sure Queensland is the generation state. The energy sector affects the lives of all Queenslanders and underpins our sustainable development, national and international competitiveness and economic growth.

When the national electricity market commenced in 1998 Queensland experienced average wholesale spot electricity prices of about \$51.65 per megawatt hour. Within the market framework for investment, and thanks to significant expenditure in electricity generation by both the private sector and government owned corporations particularly in Queensland, the average Queensland wholesale spot price in 2004-05 was \$28.96 per megawatt hour.

The introduction of customer contestability has seen large customers receive electricity cost reductions of over 25 per cent and an ability to claim the benefits of supply as a contestable customer has gradually been extended to smaller and smaller customers. Currently, electricity customers consuming more than 100 megawatt hours are eligible to choose contestability. A review is currently under way on the benefits and costs of full retail competition in electricity.

The completion of the major physical electricity transmission link between Queensland and New South Wales—the Queensland-New South Wales interconnector—in 2001 was part of Queensland's participation in the national electricity market and has brought significant benefits through major reductions in the cost of ancillary services, such as fast response generation reserves, and through reductions in the amount of generation capacity required in both states to maintain reliable supply.

Of recent times the interconnector has provided a major part of New South Wales's power requirement and has in fact flowed south for 100 per cent of the time over the last several months. This provides an additional benefit to the businesses of Queensland's generators and fuel suppliers. In December 2003 the ministerial council on energy finalised a range of major policy decisions for further energy market reform in both electricity and gas. Queensland fully supports the agreed reform package.

Queensland is leading the transmission reform agenda, a priority for Queensland due to the real gains that can be achieved in the areas of reliability and electricity prices. Queensland has most at stake in the energy reform debate, because it has the most dispersed population and the highest growth in electricity demand. To meet the demands of our geography and population growth, more investment dollars are flowing to transmission in Queensland than in any other jurisdiction—approximately \$1.3 billion since 1998, which is a third of the total investment in the national electricity market. As part of the transmission reform agenda, Queensland has facilitated the development of a new coordinated transmission planning process through the annual national transmission statement.

Mr WILSON: Thanks, Minister. Can I take you now to page 1-7 of the MPS, which refers to refining and improving emergency response plans for managing large-scale disruptions to supplies of electricity, liquid fuels and gas. What emergency training exercises did the department and the energy GOCs participate in last financial year, and how has that participation improved Queensland's emergency response plans?

Mr MICKEL: Thank you. I think it is a very timely question. Energy infrastructure is critical to our wellbeing. As such, it is important to ensure appropriate safeguards are in place to protect energy infrastructure against a range of incidents, including storms, terrorism and vandalism. Policy for the protection of critical energy infrastructure assets is coordinated by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Security Planning and Coordination Unit, under the trusted information-sharing network of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee. The Energy Infrastructure Assurance Advisory Group coordinates research and actions to improve security for critical infrastructure. The Department of Energy attends the monthly Queensland Counter-Terrorism Committee meetings initiated under the Queensland Counter-Terrorism Strategy. It has worked closely with the Security Planning and Coordination Unit and the Energy Infrastructure Assurance Advisory Group and provided information to energy infrastructure owner-operators to assist with their risk management assessments and preparedness for disruptions caused by either natural events or terrorist action.

Information provided by the Security Planning Coordination Unit, the Energy Infrastructure Assurance Advisory Group and the Australian government which has been provided to energy infrastructure owner-operators includes details of the new national critical infrastructure protection guidelines, the computer network vulnerability assessment program and supervisory control and data acquisition—that is, utility control system security issues. The Department of Energy has participated in the planning and implementation of simulated terrorist attack scenarios through discussion exercises organised by the Security Planning and Coordination Unit and the Australian government. Arrangements have been finalised for emergency electricity supplies to specific regions in the event of major long-term network outages affecting those regions lasting more than 24 hours. These procedures complement existing electricity rationing and load-shedding contingency procedures.

The department has also participated in a NEMMCO-managed simulated electrical emergency for the national electricity market. The Department of Energy has identified issues relating to emergency electricity generation caused by limitations on liquid fuel pumping at terminals and retail outlets during electrical outages. These issues are currently being reviewed with various government departments and private sector agencies to determine possible solutions. To improve gas emergency procedures, the Department of Energy has continued the review and development process for the Queensland Gas (Insufficiency of Supply) Emergency Plan, which details the gas rationing and relocation procedures during gas supply emergencies.

Mr WILSON: Thank you, Minister. Can I refer you again to page 1-6 of the MPS, which states that they have completed five community infrastructure designations for Powerlink Queensland and Ergon Energy. Could you please advise the committee what the five were, and what the benefits will be for the communities involved?

Mr MICKEL: Thank you. This was done under the Integrated Planning Act that was introduced by the Borbidge government in 1997 for land, including easements, which may be designated by a minister as land to be used for community infrastructure. Community infrastructure is infrastructure provided for the benefit or use of the whole community—roads, railways, electricity lines. The purpose of a community infrastructure designation is to identify the land required for infrastructure and relevant local government planning schemes to ensure there is no conflict with future land use planning. Once land on which infrastructure is built is designated, the infrastructure is exempt from any further planning assessments under the relevant planning schemes. Without the designation process, the construction of infrastructure could be delayed, potentially resulting in a reduction of service quality to customers or an inability to meet future customer electricity demand.

During 2004-05, the department completed five designations for electricity transmission and two for distribution line projects. They were as follows—a 1.3 kilometre section of Powerlink's Greenbank to Molendinar transmission link project; another 37.8 kilometre section of Powerlink's Greenbank to Molendinar transmission line; Powerlink's Belmont to Murarrie transmission line; Powerlink's Bundamba substation project; Powerlink's Kogan Creek to Braemar transmission line; Ergon Energy's Bulli Creek to Waggamba subtransmission line project; and Ergon Energy's Blackwater to Rolleston electricity line and substation project. The designations, completed in 2004-05, were essential elements of the

electricity entities' plans to augment their electricity supply networks in Queensland to meet increases in the demand for electricity.

During 2005-06, the department expects a substantial increase in the number of designation requests for transmission line, distribution and substation projects. Advice from the electricity entities suggests that about 45 designations will need to be processed during this period. These proposed designations arise from the need to establish significant new network infrastructure. Part of this need for new infrastructure is associated with new service standard requirements arising out of the Electricity Distribution and Service Delivery for the 21st Century review. These designations are also required to facilitate the augmentation of the transmission and distribution networks to meet projected increases in the demand for electricity associated with Queensland's strong economic and population growth, particularly in the south-east corner. Accordingly, the expected designations during 2005-06 will include a substantial number of new Energex substations. The simple fact that the department will be handling a large number of designations does not mean that standards will drop or shortcuts will be taken. All designations handled by the department have been and will be handled in accordance with the legal requirements laid down in the Integrated Planning Act of 1997.

Mr O'BRIEN: Minister, page 1-7 of the MPS refers to the review of the costs and benefits of extending electricity retail competition in Queensland. Would you update the committee on the progress of that review?

Mr MICKEL: Thank you for the question. In late 2001 the government deferred the extension of full retail competition. \$1.7 million went to small business and domestic customers, given that, at the time, the advice handed to the government was that the costs of introducing it were determined to outweigh the benefits. The government, however, gave a commitment to undertake a further review in 2004-05. This review has been conducted. The government will shortly consider the outcomes of that review including customer and industry impacts. At this stage, government consideration of this matter is likely to occur in the near future. I am advised, however, that the federal government has suspended payments to Queensland under its national competition policy of about \$22 million. I find this objectionable, given that they cannot bring in the sale of Telstra but do not seek ever to penalise themselves for that. Now that they have control of the Senate we are still waiting to see whether they can do that. There is one rule for the federal government and one rule for us and I know that on behalf of electricity consumers you would find that outrageous.

Mr FENLON: Page 1-6 of the MPS mentions clean coal technology. You have previously advised in questions on notice that Stanwell and CS Energy are investigating clean coal technologies. Could you advise the committee how much funding has been committed to date by Stanwell and by CS Energy on these investigations and what potential benefits this possesses for Queensland industry and electricity?

Mr MICKEL: I want to thank you for the question. It is an important one. I want also to commend the officers from both Stanwell and CS Energy who have been involved in the advancement of that technology. I want to encourage them and the federal government to make sure that when we put our outstanding submissions forward, as we will later in the year, the federal government will recognise those outstanding submissions in the fund that they have available. Why are we getting into this? Because, currently, over 80 per cent of our electricity requirements come from coal-fired generation. It reflects the abundance of high-quality readily accessible coal with which the state has been endowed. The extent of coal-fired generation has been reduced, as I have indicated. It is over 85 per cent coal, 13 per cent gas. Coal remains our major energy asset and the fuel source for most of our current fleet of electricity-generating plant. For the latter reason alone, coal will remain a major source of electricity in Queensland in at least the medium term.

The current fleet of generators, however, is the most modern and lowest-emitting in Australia. The last four plants—Callide C, Millmerran, Tarong North and Kogan Creek, under construction—all use supercritical steam cycle technology to increase efficiency. Millmerran and Kogan Creek are both dry-cooled stations, and so use up to 90 per cent less water than conventional stations. The recognised need to address the issue of greenhouse gas emissions, the limitations of renewable energy sources in meeting current and projected electricity requirements and the fact of Queensland's coal endowments leads to the need to examine the potential for the utilisation of coal in a low-emission manner. The government has already made commitments to this endeavour through the establishment of the Centre for Low Emission Technology. The \$26 million Centre for Low Emission Technology, opened by the honourable the Premier on 21 November 2003, is an unincorporated joint venture between the Queensland government, the Commonwealth Scientific Industrial Research Organisation, Australian Coal Research Limited, Stanwell Corporation, Tarong Energy and the University of Queensland.

The government owned corporations of Stanwell Corporation and CS Energy Ltd are active participants and are also pursuing the development of demonstration projects using integrated gasification combined cycle and oxy-firing technologies to generate electricity using coal while capturing and potentially storing the carbon dioxide produced. As I indicated, these projects have potential to access the federal government's \$500 million fund for demonstration of low emission technology projects and, as I said, I hope the federal government will recognise our quality submissions when they are lodged later in the year.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for the consideration of the estimates in the areas of Energy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy has expired. On behalf of the committee I wish to thank you, Minister, and your departmental staff and GOC officers for their attendance here this evening.

Mr MICKEL: Thank you, Mr Chairman and committee members. Could I thank my own Department of Energy. Also, I would like to thank the CEOs of the GOCs for being here and for learning more about the parliamentary democratic process. I thank them for their briefings to us. I also thank my hardworking staff for preparing the information to enable us to fully inform the committee of the operations. Thank you very much.

CHAIR: Before I conclude, I would also, on behalf of the committee, like to thank the Hansard staff, the timekeepers and the attendants as well as Stephen Finnimore, Siwan Davies, Andrea Musch and the other secretariat staff for all their effort in bringing this committee to its deliberations. I would also like to thank my long-suffering electorate officer, Wendy Ferguson-Bennett, who shudders each time I tell her I am chairing an estimates committee. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 11 May 2005. I declare the public meeting closed.

Committee adjourned at 7.14 pm