

THURSDAY, 14 JULY 2005

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—TOURISM, FAIR TRADING AND WINE INDUSTRY DEVELOPMENT

Estimates Committee G Members

Mr RL Poole (Chair)
Mr PA Hoolihan
Mr DW Livingstone
Mr TG Malone
Mr IP Rickuss
Mrs CE Sullivan
Mr PW Wellington

In Attendance

Hon. MM Keech, Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development
Mr M Caldwell, Senior Policy Advisor
Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development
Ms H Ringrose, Director-General
Mr P Cook, Director, Financial Management Unit (Acting)
Ms C Maconachie, Principal Policy Officer, Policy and Coordination Unit
Mr L Longland, Commissioner for Fair Trading (Acting)
Ms F Fitzpatrick, Deputy Commissioner, Office of Fair Trading (Acting)
Mr C Watters, Executive Director, Liquor Licensing Division
Mr I Mitchell, Chief Executive Officer, Tourism Queensland
Ms H Moore, Executive Director, Corporate Services, Tourism Queensland
Mr B Bauer, Director, Commercial and Consumer Tribunal Registry, Dispute Resolution
Ms N Doumany, Commissioner, Office of Body Corporate and Community, Dispute Resolution (Acting)

Committee met at 8.30 am

CHAIR: I declare the meeting of Estimates Committee G open. I am Robert Poole, the member for Gaven and chair of the committee. My fellow committee members are Mr Paul Hoolihan, the member for Keppel; Mr Don Livingstone, the member for Ipswich West; Mrs Carryn Sullivan, the member for Pumicestone; Mr Ted Malone, the member for Mirani; Mr Ian Rickuss, the member for Lockyer; and Mr Peter Wellington, the member for Nicklin. The committee has also given leave for non-committee members to ask the minister questions. The following persons will be participating in today's hearing on that basis: Dr Bruce Flegg, the member for Moggill; Mr Marc Rowell, the member for Hinchinbrook; the Hon. Kevin Lingard, the member for Beaudesert; and Mrs Jann Stuckey, the member for Currumbin.

The committee will examine the proposed expenditure contained in the Appropriation Bill 2005 for the portfolios of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development; Emergency Services; and Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women, in that order.

In relation to media coverage of today's hearing, the committee has resolved that television film coverage and photography be allowed during the chair's opening statement and the introductory statements of each minister as well as for short periods during each changeover of ministerial advisers. There will be a 15-minute morning tea break at 10 am, a 1-hour lunch break at 12.50 pm and a short break at 3.20 pm and 5 pm.

In the event that those attending today are not aware, I point out that proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard I remind visitors that, in accordance with standing order 286, any person admitted to the public hearing of the committee may be excluded by order of the committee.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for the answers. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents. The standing orders require that at least half the time for questions at today's hearing is allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns at asking questions in blocks of equal time. Please also ensure that mobile phones and pagers are switched off while in the chamber so as not to disrupt proceedings.

The first area to be examined relates to the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. The time allotted is three hours and 15 minutes, with a 15-minute break at 10 am. I declare the proposed expenditure for the portfolio relating to the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

I welcome the minister and representatives from the department who are in attendance today. Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning?

Ms KEECH: I would like to make a brief opening remark.

CHAIR: The committee asks you to limit it to five minutes.

Ms KEECH: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and good morning to the committee. Thank you for this opportunity to present the expenditure for my Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. In fact, this year has been a very busy year and a very successful year for my department, with a range of very important achievements. Over the past year the Beattie government has placed a high priority on enhancing people's safety in communities across Queensland. In doing this, the Liquor Licensing Division of my department has played a vital role and continues to do that.

One of the division's many responsibilities is to ensure that licensed premises provide a safe environment for patrons, staff and the public. It is also entrusted with a major role in helping address the effects of alcohol abuse and misuse in Indigenous communities. Liquor Licensing officers work closely with police, licensees and the communities to develop workable programs aimed at addressing issues of concern. The division in recent months has been a major player in the development of Premier Peter Beattie's Brisbane City Safety Action Plan. As a government we took decisive action following the tragic deaths of two young men in the inner city. A 3 am lockout was implemented for all late-trading premises in the Brisbane City Council area and off-premises advertising of drink promotions was banned. There has been a crackdown on promotions and activities which encourage binge drinking.

We have also been working with local councils, police, licensees and local communities in a number of other communities to establish or continue programs aimed at reducing antisocial behaviour, street crime and boosting safety on and near licensed premises. The division has also been actively involved with other government agencies and, in particular, Minister Desley Boyle's department and the Brisbane City Council in developing a legislative framework to ensure that Brisbane's Fortitude Valley can remain a loud and proud live music and entertainment precinct. This framework is attracting national and, I am told, international attention and is a very exciting initiative.

The year also has heralded a new era for Queensland tourism. The government has licensed the commercial operations of Tourism Queensland's commercial arm, which will provide considerable benefits to the tourism industry. The arrangement allows Tourism Queensland to concentrate on its core functions: selling Queensland on a national and international stage. The substantial licence fee will be invested in international marketing, bringing more tourists to Queensland and creating more jobs for Queenslanders, particularly in the regions.

Queensland's tourism industry is flying high because of continued air access improvements over the past 12 months. There have been dramatic increases in international and domestic flights and seat capacity into Queensland—a 10 per cent hike on domestic routes, which is 20,000 seats a week, and a 9,000 increase in international seat capacity between April and October this year. Over the past three years international seat capacity into Queensland has increased by a staggering 48 per cent—well over 19,000 seats per week. Australia's inbound tourism industry is expected to grow at an annual rate of 5.8 per cent per annum over the next decade, with steady growth in the domestic market over the next 10 years. Queensland, as a preferred destination, is positioned to be one of the biggest beneficiaries. In order to be best placed to derive maximum benefits, I have directed my portfolio to develop a new long-term tourism strategy. We must be prepared with the appropriate infrastructure, products and services to be able to attract and accommodate this growth and sustain a vibrant industry over time.

My department over the past year has taken on an enormous legislative reform program, and I thank our dedicated officers for the fine work they do for Queenslanders. Through the Office of Fair

Trading we have completed the review of the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act, and reviews of the Security Providers Act, the Associations Incorporation Act and the Retirement Villages Act are continuing. Our review of body corporate and community management legislation is also nearing completion. I look forward to my Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development, as well as the Office of Fair Trading and Tourism Queensland, continuing to work to deliver for the people of Queensland during 2005-06.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. We will commence with the units of fair trading and wine industry development. The first round of questions is from non-government members. I call the member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, at page 1-2 and 1-3 of the MPS you refer to significant work to be undertaken by staff in the Office of Fair Trading. How do you and your director-general propose to deliver these important services when it has been reported that your director-general has placed embargoes on the appointment of new permanent staff and has seconded staff to relieving and temporary positions? How many permanent positions are currently vacant in the department and how many staff are performing duties in temporary or relieving positions?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. The member is absolutely correct: my department, and particularly the Office of Fair Trading, has a very busy workload and we have had since I have been a minister—in particular, working through the legislation reform. I particularly thank the member for Nicklin for the work he has done and his assistance with respect to the Retirement Villages Act and also the invitation that he presented to me to go up to his area and meet with retirement village residents.

With respect to staff in the department, the number of full-time equivalent staff in 2004-05 was 326. This is a variation on the 2003-04 figure, which was 384. The reason for the variation is the transition of staff from the department's Service Delivery and Development Division to Smart Service Queensland, which is approximately 38 staff. Also for the member's information, there was a reduction in the number of corporate service staff within the department and hence a reduction in the corporate service allocation against the fair trading output of approximately 10 staff.

With respect to the breakdown of staff as the member has asked, approximately 35 per cent of staff allocated to compliance and enforcement related activities, which is a very important part indeed of the department, are predominantly located within the Office of Fair Trading's Compliance Division and Strategic Compliance and Enforcement Operations Unit. Staff work directly towards protecting Queenslanders from unscrupulous traders.

I have been advised that the total temporary staff is 36.8 and the total vacancies is 44.2. These include long-term temporary positions and positions where higher duties are being performed, which means that the total genuine vacancies are 13. These are where positions are unoccupied without persons performing higher duties and that number also includes one unfunded position.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, it is a very unusual and, in fact, drastic action for a minister to refer their own director-general to the Public Service Commissioner for allegedly bullying staff. What actions had you previously taken as minister to remedy the situation in the department and why have you now taken this action of referring the director-general to the Public Service Commissioner?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. Can I say at the outset that I take any allegations of bullying within my department very seriously indeed. Also, for the member's information, I am advised that no formal grievances or bullying complaints have been lodged within my department over the past 12 months. With respect to the issue that you have mentioned, when the allegations were raised I referred the allegations—and I do say that they are allegations—to the Public Service Commissioner. As I said, I do ensure that members of my department have the right to be able to work in a harassment-free environment so that they can provide the very best services possible to the people of Queensland. In fact, so strongly do I feel about ensuring correct behaviour in the workplace that after only, I think, about two or three weeks when I first became the minister for the department I wrote to every member of staff in my department. In that email that I sent to them not only did I introduce myself and inform the staff how pleased I was to be their minister but also I reminded them of the code of conduct and my expectations of their behaviour within the workplace.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, has your director-general ever issued a direction to staff of the department—either verbally or in writing—that no member of the staff is to have any contact with a member of parliament and threatened that if they did so they would be charged?

Ms KEECH: Given that we are referring to issues with respect to the MPS and the appropriation bill, I really do believe that that question is not in order. Mr Chairman?

CHAIR: I was just about to make a comment. I think we might stick to the budget and what the estimates is about, thank you. Can we move on to the next question, please?

Mr LINGARD: I will remind you that the Premier agreed to answer all questions at the start of this particular estimates and I am concerned if you are going to refuse to answer those sorts of questions.

Ms KEECH: For the member's information, my department has a very low rate of grievances resulting from alleged harassment. In fact, for the member's information there have been only three formal grievances lodged over the last three years and none in the past 12 months.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to page 1-1 of the MPS and the strategic issues. Has your director-general abolished meetings of the executive management team of your department and insisted that they report directly to her?

Ms KEECH: Again I would refer to the direction that the chair has already given. What I can say is that I am very proud, first of all, to be the minister for my department. I appreciate the advice that I receive from my department, including my director-general and my executive directors. We have regular meetings—at least once a week—where we exchange full and frank advice. As minister I certainly rely on those meetings and the advice that I receive both from the director-general and from the executive directors.

Mr LINGARD: I think taxpayers would be concerned if they believed that money in this budget was being spent in an area that they believe it should not be spent on, like a director-general who might forbid members of the executive management team briefing you directly rather than she herself doing that.

Ms KEECH: As I said, I think we are going down a long path. The chairman of the committee—and I respect his ruling—has already indicated that these questions are out of order.

Mr LINGARD: Are you refusing to answer those questions?

Ms KEECH: I am not refusing to answer them; I am actually very keen to answer questions with respect to the appropriation bill of my department and the MPS.

Mr LINGARD: Referring to the member for Nicklin's question, how many members of the executive management team of your department were acting in their positions?

Ms KEECH: I can refer that one to the director-general.

Ms Ringrose: There is only one member of the executive management group who is acting at the moment, and that is Laurie Longland, who is the acting Commissioner for Fair Trading. His normal position is the Executive Director, Executive and Corporate Services.

Ms KEECH: Thank you, director-general. Just following on, for the member's information, as he would be aware the Commissioner for Fair Trading, Matt Miller, was headhunted by the federal government. I am on record saying that it is the federal government's gain and Queensland's loss. With respect to the commissioner's position, that has been advertised extensively. It is a very important position. It is particularly important for protecting the consumers of Queensland and also ensuring that businesses across Queensland conduct fair trading. We are in the interview process with respect to filling that position for the commissioner as quickly as we can.

Mr LINGARD: It is quite obvious in the department that some of these positions have not been made permanent and this has assisted you in your budget management.

Ms KEECH: Would the director-general like to respond to that?

Ms Ringrose: That is not correct.

Mr LINGARD: Why is it not correct?

Ms KEECH: As I said, I think I will refer to the chairman for direction on these questions.

CHAIR: Can we move on from that, please? May I add that questions will be directed to the minister and not one of the staffers.

Ms KEECH: Thank you, Mr Chairman.

Mrs STUCKEY: Good morning, Minister. I would like to thank the chair very much for allowing me leave to appear on this committee and I also wish to thank other members of the committee.

I refer to page 1-10 of the MPS 1-10, which states 'commenced the transition of selected business processes to Smart Service Queensland'. Minister, I understand that there have been major problems for consumers and businesses accessing the call centre since the transition, with average wait times and abandonment rates dramatically increasing. I have heard several complaints about this from both consumers and businesses alike as well as concerns over the quality of the said advice given. Can you tell me why the average wait time has blown out from 48 seconds, as mentioned in the last annual report, to 4½ minutes, and why the abandonment rates have gone from six per cent to 32 per cent? Is this acceptable under the terms of your service agreement?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. Smart Service Queensland and the service that the call centre provides is extremely important. I am surprised about the negative comments that the member has made regarding the service that has been provided. I will share with you an example. On one occasion when I was at home with my 19-year-old daughter, a gentleman came along, knocked on the door and asked for money for some children from the bush foundation, or something. My daughter,

being the kind girl that she is, straightaway ran to her purse to get the money. After the timely reminders from Fair Trading I said to her, 'Wait a minute, let's go out and talk to the gentleman and ask for his ID.' The gentleman had no ID. He turned around and ran quickly back out to his car when we requested the ID. I then actually rang the 1300 number just for information, and I have to say that I was very impressed indeed. I did not say who I was; they did not ask for my name. I was very impressed with the quality of the service. I had to be referred, I expect, to the department. It was timely. It was polite. It was professional. I am surprised at the negative comments that you have about the service because that is not my experience.

With respect to times, regarding the average advice line waiting time, the MPS indicates that in 2004-05 the target was 60 seconds and the estimated actual for 2004-05 was 69 seconds. We are continuing to ensure that we do meet our targets and we really want customers to have the very best service that they can possibly have. Certainly the director-general is working with Smart Service Queensland to ensure that those targets are met.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, once again I am referring to page 1-10 of the MPS, which states, 'commenced the transition of selected business processes to Smart Service Queensland in support of the Government's integrated service delivery strategy.' Is the Minister aware of claims that her director-general has taken around \$1 million from her reserve fund to prop up Smart Service Queensland, which I acknowledge is attached to the Department of Communities? Minister, is your director-general aware of this and is this true?

Ms KEECH: I will refer that question to the director-general.

Ms Ringrose: The director-general's budget includes a two per cent levy across-the-board in all divisions within the department. That is a reserve that I use for unforeseen and unexpected expenditure within the department. Some of that funding—and I will have to get the figure for you—has been spent on the delivery of Smart Service Queensland transition of services which, of course, was a cabinet directive that those services be transferred, certainly not all of the \$1 million that you have referred to.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, through you could I scrutinise the accounts from the director-general's reserve fund?

Ms KEECH: Is this pertaining to the MPS?

Mrs STUCKEY: It is pertaining to MPS 1-10.

Ms KEECH: If you would like to ask a further question of me, yes.

Mrs STUCKEY: I would ask the Minister if I could scrutinise the accounts from the director-general's reserve fund.

Ms KEECH: The standing orders indicate that the member asks the question to the minister and then this minister decides how to respond and, if she prefers, to refer to another departmental officer. So please ask the question.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, can I carry on with that particular question? In that section that the member for Currumbin referred to there were two parts. One was the wine industry strategy and the second one was the Queensland Tourism Strategy. Why was \$249,000 needed urgently for the wine industry from that \$1 million account?

Ms KEECH: Questions with respect to the wine industry are going to be asked at 9.30. If you want to ask questions about the wine industry, I am more than happy to do that now.

Mr LINGARD: We are certainly talking about the \$1 million reserve account, of which \$249,000 was for the wine industry and another one was for Tourism Strategy. I ask the director-general: why \$249,000 as emergency funding for the wine industry?

Ms KEECH: I refer to the director-general.

Ms Ringrose: Of the \$1 million in my reserve, \$249,000 was allocated to cover staff and administrative costs for the production of the wine industry development strategy. When the wine industry development strategy was originally established, we had no staffing resources to do that and it was necessary for me to second staff into that division to allow the establishment of the strategy. Following the development of that strategy and in the new budget year, we were then given funds. So it was, if you like, funding to get the strategy up and running by seconding staff and, of course, they had to be paid for.

Ms KEECH: Thank you, director-general. Just following on from that, as the member would be aware, with the Premier announcing in 2004 the establishment of the Wine Industry Development portfolio—the first in the world, I am pleased to say—obviously the director-general had to act immediately to ensure that we had staff for that position whilst we were waiting for the next budget to come on board.

Mrs STUCKEY: Through the chair, Minister, I repeat my question to you: can I inspect the director-general's reserve fund?

Ms KEECH: If you would like to ask a specific question, please ask it.

Mrs STUCKEY: Can I inspect the contents of the reserve fund?

Ms KEECH: I am actually trying to help the member. I am not too sure—

Mrs STUCKEY: It is what I requested in the question before: whether you were aware of claims that \$1 million has gone from that reserve fund to prop up Smart Service Queensland?

Ms KEECH: The director-general has responded to that question.

Mrs STUCKEY: And I am asking to inspect those accounts of the reserve fund.

Ms KEECH: Inspect the accounts?

Mrs STUCKEY: Or get a breakdown of them.

Ms KEECH: Like as an accountant or something like that? In fact, it is the Auditor-General's responsibility to inspect, as you say, and investigate the accounts of the department and, I would say, certainly not an invited member of the committee.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, would we be able to see the contents of that so that we could scrutinise the transactions?

Ms KEECH: In the question you were referring to Smart Service Queensland. There was \$264,000 for the Smart Service Queensland integration project for funding of contractors and supplies associated with this project for the period 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005.

Mrs STUCKEY: Thank you, Minister. Minister, it is almost Ekka time again, and every year the Office of Fair Trading does a great job scrutinising sample bags.

Ms KEECH: Thank you.

Mrs STUCKEY: But last year I was concerned about a sideshow alley stall called One-in-Wins comprising a basketball hoop, which was clearly targeted at small children, charging \$3 a throw for the chance to win a fluffy toy. Show officials swiftly took action after it was revealed that the basketball hoops were rigged to make it much harder to win prizes. But in stark contrast—

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

Ms KEECH: I was looking forward to hearing more of that question.

CHAIR: The member is entitled to ask the question later.

Ms KEECH: Maybe we can have a chat about it later.

CHAIR: I call upon the member for Keppel.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I refer you to page 1-11 of the MPS regarding the ongoing implementation of a strategy to improve financial literacy, particularly among young people. Can you report to the committee on the progress of this strategy?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for his question and for his ongoing advocacy for his constituents, particularly when it comes to fair trading issues.

The Beattie government is leading a national project to ensure that young people have the skills to make informed decisions about their money, both now and into the future. You are never too young to learn valuable consumer messages and they can remain with you for life.

I am committed to helping raise the awareness in young people of consumer issues. This commitment is shared by the education minister, the Hon. Anna Bligh. The Office of Fair Trading and the Department of Education and the Arts are working together to lead a unique cross-portfolio national working party to implement a national plan so that this generation and following generations have the necessary skills and resources to better manage their money.

The national working party is implementing a four-pillar national plan that aims to reduce the current and future levels of debt among young people. I know that the honourable member would share my concern about the amount of debt that young people get themselves into. The key pillars of the national plan, which is to be implemented over the next two years, are to seek Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs support, to embed consumer and financial literacy in national statements of learning, a national research project on youth debt, a national communication strategy and expansion of available consumer and financial literacy resources for young people.

The Beattie government has provided funding from the Consumer Credit Fund to lead this national project and to develop new skill resources for Queensland teachers and young people. So far, the working party has collaboratively developed a national framework for consumer and financial literacy which is aimed at promoting national consistency among curriculum resources. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs has endorsed the development of the framework and has formed a working party to complete the framework by August 2005.

The Office of Fair Trading has contributed to the development of a national youth consumer financial literacy research proposal to provide a national perspective on issues impacting on the levels of financial literacy among young people. Queensland also leads the development of a national communication strategy for the project.

This is about ensuring that our young people are skilled up when it comes to issues of consumer credit. All of us are aware that it is far too easy these days for young people to gain access to credit cards, and that sort of thing. The more education that the Beattie government conducts, the more we will be able to protect young people.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I refer you to MPS 1-10 and the government's intention to commence a review of the Security Providers Act 1993. Has this review commenced and what is its status?

Ms KEECH: The answer is yes, it has commenced, and it is progressing well. My department has just completed industry and community consultation as part of a review of the Security Providers Act 1993 after 10 years of operation. The central focus of the consultation was the release of a paper for public comment which contained issues of concern to the security industry and to the wider community. It was obvious that we needed to update legislation and to tighten industry entry conditions. Recent events involving security personnel have highlighted that need.

As a government, we have a responsibility both to the security industry and to the people of Queensland to ensure that this legislation operates as efficiently and as effectively as possible, with the safety of Queenslanders at the forefront of our considerations. It is obvious that we need more stringent entry conditions and better training for those who work in what is a rapidly expanding industry.

The review, chaired by Cate Molloy, the member for Noosa, has also considered training, compliance and enforcement, responsible service of alcohol, the training required for the use of guard dogs, and the ratio of crowd controllers to patrons.

Public submissions closed on the discussion paper on 31 May this year. I was very pleased indeed with the responses, with over 100 submissions received. For the member's information, a snapshot of the responses which have been analysed to date indicates that almost 90 per cent of respondents to a particular question favoured an extension to the existing licensing categories under the act, 97 per cent of respondents to a particular question favoured aligning the training regimes for the relevant licence category to the specific competencies required to perform that role, 95 per cent of respondents to a particular question favoured extending the statutory criteria to determine a person's appropriateness to hold a licence, which means they actually want us to be tougher, and 47 per cent of respondents to a particular question believe that the existing penalties under the act are not a sufficient consequence for contravention of the act.

The government will now consider the public comment from the release of this paper with a view to ensuring that the act continues to maintain its objectives. I take the safety of Queenslanders in licensed venues very seriously indeed. I am committed to ensuring that Queensland paves the way for adequate licensing and training requirements for security providers.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, the MPS at 1-9 and 1-12 refers to compensation and redress obtained by the Office of Fair Trading for Queensland consumers. I know that you are proud of the consumer protection education programs initiated by the Beattie government. I am also aware of your determination to continue to boost this regime. Can you expand on how much redress was obtained for consumers in 2004-05?

Ms KEECH: The member is right, I am very proud of the work of the Office of Fair Trading in protecting Queensland consumers. During 2004-05, the Office of Fair Trading obtained approximately \$3.7 million in redress for consumers. This amount is approximately \$700,000 over and above the expected amount. It is an example of the Office of Fair Trading's commitment to achieving maximum results for consumers. The OFT negotiated well over \$3 million in redress for consumers in 2003-04, an increase of more than \$1 million on the 2002-03 figure.

Fair Trading's profile in the community has increased. That is reflected in the number of consumers who now seek the assistance of the Office of Fair Trading to resolve their disputes. They know about the service of the Office of Fair Trading, for a start, and they have confidence that it will do its very best to help consumers.

While most businesses are responsible traders and should be applauded for contributing to a fair marketplace, the OFT spends 60 per cent of its operational budget on efforts to weed out and deal with rogue operators. The OFT cannot always obtain redress for consumers who believe that they have been wronged. However, we have an impressive record of helping those who look to us to right the perceived wrong.

For the member's information, during 2004-05, \$1.77 million in redress was achieved through the conciliation of complaints, \$148,572 in redress to consumers through the Travel Compensation Fund, \$918,300 in redress as a result of investigations, \$698,467 in redress from claims paid by the claim fund established under the Property Agents and Motor Dealers Act 2000, \$155,856 of restitution and compensation awarded to consumers through actions taken by the Office of Fair Trading through the courts and the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal.

These figures represent a wide range of issues, from simple and small issues to major restitution. Examples include only \$1.30 from a health food shop at Taringa for a consumer who believed that the store was not appropriately advising of the goods and services tax. Another example is \$300 from a trader who would not replace the bowl in a consumer's washing machine under warranty conditions. A

more substantial example, \$51,250 from a motor dealer following a consumer purchasing a defective vehicle.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, at pages 1-9 and 1-11 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement it refers to the Office of Fair Trading delivering effective consumer protection. Can you advise the committee of the number of enforcement actions taken during the year and how such actions send a message to those within the relevant industry sectors to lift their game?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question and for his hard work with respect to his constituents and delivering the Beattie government's promise of protection for consumers and ensuring a fair marketplace.

The Office of Fair Trading has a strong focus on ensuring compliance with legislation that it administers. It takes appropriate enforcement action, including commencing proceedings in the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal or the courts against traders who have not complied with the law. As I indicated earlier, the great majority of traders in Queensland do the right thing. Unfortunately, most of our time is spent on that small percentage who are repeat offenders.

Prosecution or disciplinary action in the CCT and/or the courts is reserved for the most serious cases of noncompliance with my department's legislation. The OFT has a highly successful prosecution record. During 2004-05, the office initiated 83 and finalised 116 actions in the tribunal and courts. This resulted in over \$1.27 million being awarded in penalties. This compares to 72 matters initiated and 69 finalised during the previous financial year. As you can see, each year, the Office of Fair Trading is working harder and harder.

I would like to give the member some highlights of the prosecutions during the year, including Australia's first two successful marketeering prosecutions. Property marketeer Daniel Croke of Sunnybank Hills, his company and five other individuals were ordered to pay almost \$310,000 in fines, costs and compensation. Parties were disqualified from holding a licence or engaging in real estate activity for four years. In addition, marketeers Northern Sun Realty, Starlink Promotions and Phillip Hall, all of Surfers Paradise, were fined \$66,000 and ordered to pay costs. Each was disqualified for one year for marketeering offences.

There have been a range of other prosecutions. In particular, Gold Coast based Power Pacific and Spacelink Holdings, two of its directors and office manager have been the subject of an interim injunction in the Federal Court to prevent them engaging in misleading and deceptive invoice fraud. This is the first time that a state or territory fair trading agency has ever taken action in the Federal Court to secure nation-wide orders to prevent illegal conduct occurring Australia-wide. A further investigation was conducted, resulting in the execution of a second search warrant on a business and personal premises. A brief is currently being prepared in order to commence further proceedings in the Federal Court.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, I refer you to 1-3 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement and the Office of Fair Trading's commitment to provide information and advice to consumers and business on fair trading matters. Can you tell the committee how the Office of Fair Trading measures its effectiveness in achieving this?

Ms KEECH: The Beattie government works tirelessly to ensure that Queensland consumers and businesses are kept up-to-date and reminded of key fair trading issues. To measure the effectiveness of its effort, Fair Trading has undertaken a regular schedule of data collection and reporting using four marketplace surveys. We do this because we want to see how well our programs are running and to get feedback from consumers in the marketplace about how we can actually improve the service that we offer to the people of Queensland. The four marketplace surveys are the trader confidence survey, the consumer confidence survey, the customer satisfaction survey and the Queensland household survey. The results of the surveys form an essential part of the OFT's performance measurement.

The trader confidence survey measures business confidence that there is a fair and ethical market place in Queensland. It covers perceptions of fair and ethical trading in Queensland, reasons for business compliance with fair trading laws and how businesses stay up-to-date with regulation and awareness of OFT's resource publications. I am pleased to inform the member that in 2004-05, 85.6 per cent of traders agreed or strongly agreed that most businesses and traders are fair and ethical, which means that within the marketplace itself there is that perception that the traders are doing the right thing.

The consumer confidence survey measures Queenslanders' confidence in buying goods and services. The survey covers perceptions of fair and ethical trading by Queensland businesses and traders, confidence in purchasing a range of products and services and awareness of OFT: 73.2 per cent of Queensland consumers agreed or strongly agreed that Queensland consumers could safely buy products and services knowing that most businesses or traders would be fair and ethical. Of course, as local members, we would love that to be 100 per cent, but I guess there are always those rogue operators in the marketplace who do the wrong thing and give their industries a bad name.

The customer satisfaction survey measures satisfaction levels among the Office of Fair Trading's customers. Data is gathered on the level of satisfaction with the service provided, the perceived importance level of each service and the level of satisfaction with publications. Overall, a very creditable

74 per cent of all respondents to this survey were satisfied or very satisfied with the level of customer service they received from OFT. Again, OFT will be working to ensure that we can improve on that number as we are always trying to improve the service delivery to the people of Queensland.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Thank you for your detailed answer. I refer to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement page 1-7 regarding the review of the Associations Incorporation Act 1981. Could you please report to the committee on the progress of these amendments?

Ms KEECH: I am very happy to do so and I thank the member for the question because he would have quite a large number of not-for-profit incorporated associations in his electorate of Ipswich West. Many Queenslanders belong to a voluntary non-profit association at some time in their lives, whether that is a social or sporting club, an artistic society, an association with a religious, patriotic or political interest or a professional or charitable organisation. In fact, across Queensland almost 20,000 associations are currently registered. The Associations Incorporation Act 1981 provides a simple and inexpensive method of incorporation for non-profit organisations and this is important since these associations work so hard to raise their funds.

While the act has worked very well indeed over its 23-year history, concerns have been raised about some features of its operation. In response to these concerns I commenced a review of the act. This review is a priority for me given the importance of not-for-profit associations in our electorates. A comprehensive public consultation process began with the launch of a discussion paper on 24 February 2005. The review of the Associations Incorporation Act is considering questions such as whether there should be tiered reporting requirements for associations. While recognising the need to maintain high standards of accountability, perhaps smaller organisations do not need to provide the same level of financial reporting as large associations. I am sure this is something that members have had associations talk to them about. Reduced reporting would decrease costs to the associations and to the government, particularly in rural and regional areas where sometimes it is quite difficult to get an auditor.

Another issue that we are looking at is whether provisions making insurance compulsory for associations should be maintained or improved. I am aware that some associations have had trouble obtaining insurance in the current climate. I also acknowledge the fact that the Queensland government has moved to reform the insurance context so that it is actually a little bit easier.

Another issue that we are looking at is whether there should be improved mechanisms for associations to resolve disputes. Many associations find the current arrangements too formal and expensive. An additional issue is how it could be made easier for organisations to move between organisational structures, for example, being set up as companies, charities or cooperatives as their needs vary.

The consultation period closed in April. My department has received nearly 300 responses to the discussion paper from association members and others in the community. I thank all members for helping us get that message out about the review and I look forward to reporting back to parliament.

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

Mrs STUCKEY: Following on from my last question which I did not quite finish in relation to the side show alley stall called One-in-Wins, show officials swiftly took action after it was revealed that the basketball hoops were rigged to make it much harder to win prizes. In stark contrast you were quoted—and I will table the *Courier-Mail* article from August 2004—as saying ‘that is all part of the fun of the show’. I ask: since when is it fun to rip off small children? Aren’t you just giving a green light to rogue operators?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. She is correct in that it is Ekka time. I am looking forward to going out with the Office of Fair Trading once again to the Ekka to ensure that the show bags are safe for children, but also to reminding parents that they have a responsibility to ensure that they check the show bags.

With respect to the issue raised regarding the game at the Ekka, can I just inform the member that the Office of Fair Trading does do spot checks, whether they be for show bags or for games and other entertainment that is provided at the Ekka. In fact, a stronger approach to incidence of noncompliance with mandatory safety standards is being taken. As a result, eight infringement notices of \$600 each were issued. Additionally, two enforceable undertakings under the Fair Trading Act 1999 were secured from suppliers of non-compliant toys and cigarette lighters with a further undertaking pending.

Also as a result of intervention by the Office of Fair Trading two traders agreed to initiate national product safety recalls where noncompliance with mandatory safety standards was identified, with a further two traders initiating Queensland-wide recalls. Regarding the game that you are talking about, the basketball hoop—

Mrs STUCKEY: One-in-Wins, I think it is called.

Ms KEECH: Thank you for that. I will refer to the acting commissioner.

Mr Longland: We do not have any detail on that particular game.

Ms KEECH: I thank the member; she does have the media release there. It is almost a year ago, but I do recall that there was some comment with respect to those games. I know that the Office of Fair Trading did investigate it, but I am happy to provide additional information for the member.

CHAIR: Standing order 103 provides that a member may table a document with the leave of the committee. Is leave granted?

Leave granted.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, I refer to page 1-3 of your portfolio statement where you refer to over 100 identified licensing, registration and information services from across the department that are to be transferred to Smart Service Queensland for integrated government service delivery. I ask: what resources are allocated to monitoring how effective Smart Service Queensland is in providing the service? How do staff make suggestions on how the service can be improved or modified?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. It is an important question. With respect to Smart Service Queensland, the reason that cabinet decided that we should set this up is that we wanted to ensure that, basically, it was a one-stop-shop for a large number of services that departments and agencies provide and also to ensure a consistency of response. The last thing we want is, for example, a consumer ringing with respect to a particular issue and then ringing again maybe in a week's time and getting another person and then having to go through the same story again. The whole idea of Smart Service Queensland is to ensure basically a better service for all Queenslanders.

In December 2003 the government endorsed a strategy to migrate more than 400 whole-of-government licensing, registration and information services to Smart Service Queensland over the next five years. My department provides 102 of these services. The whole-of-government approach is already delivering benefits to the community. For example, as I said, customers can now access a range of government services and information via the channels that best suit them. Many services are being provided through extended operating hours. I will just mention this for the member. The extension of operation hours means that the Smart Service Queensland call centre now operates from 8 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday and 8 am to 4.45 pm on Saturday. So that has been of particular benefit to working Queenslanders.

As I indicated, there is consistency in the information and advice provided to clients, and regional and remote clients in particular have improved access to services. To ensure that the integration of services progresses as smoothly as possible, my department is adopting a transitional strategy of collocating services prior to full integration into Smart Service Queensland. Smart Service Queensland has implemented a comprehensive training strategy which includes significant information technology and process changes.

For the member's information, already 88 per cent of the total transactional volume of the 102 departmental services identified for migration have already been transferred to Smart Service Queensland. This represents approximately half a million transactions per year. The services which have been fully integrated and became the responsibility of SSQ as at 1 March include—and if the member wants I can actually indicate some of those if the member would like an extension?

Mr WELLINGTON: I have a follow-on question. How do staff make suggestions about how the resources and the service can be improved? Who do they contact? Do they contact you directly as the minister? Who do they contact if they believe the delivery of service for Queenslanders can be improved?

Ms KEECH: That is a very important question. I have to say that, as the minister, I am always very keen indeed to improve the services that we provide for the people of Queensland. As I have indicated in the previous answer to the member for Ipswich West regarding, for example, customer satisfaction with OFT's delivery of services, no matter how good the results are we always want to improve on them. I invite the director-general to indicate some of the actual detail of how staff can have feedback on improving the services.

Ms Ringrose: The department is conducting a number of business process reviews as part of the transition of services to Smart Service Queensland. In those reviews there are assessments of resources required to migrate those services. All staff participate in focus groups and workshops as part of those reviews. It is in those workshops that they would be contributing to assessment of resources required for those operations.

Mr LINGARD: You have already indicated a hesitancy to give us the details of that departmental reserve fund which is referred to sometimes as the chief executive officer contingency fund. Within a few days of last year's estimates—on 27 July—you allocated \$249,000 to the wine department, \$264,000 to Smart Service and you gave another officer to the director-general. We would be concerned that within a few days of these estimates you did exactly the same thing, because we think that is deceitful. That is before parliament even passes the budget. Why was it done last year and will you do it again this year?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. First of all, can I refute what he is saying about me allocating funding. I actually do not allocate any funding whatsoever; that is the responsibility of the

director-general. The Treasurer allocates funding to my portfolio, which is then allocated through the director-general. So I invite the director-general to respond.

Ms Ringrose: The contingency fund that I had last year, as I stated earlier, was a two per cent levy that I impose across all operating budgets. After consultation with my executive management group there were, throughout the year, six or seven different areas where I allocated funds for both emergent and unforeseen events that occurred during that year.

I have a breakdown of those figures if you want those. We have already referred to the \$264,000 for the Smart Service Queensland and the \$249,000 for the wine industry strategy, which I also gave details of earlier.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, do you not regard it as basically dishonest if someone creates a two per cent levy and then allocates it for a new strategy in the wine industry?

Ms KEECH: I do not consider it to be dishonest at all. I think that is a very unfair and very uncharitable observation. In fact, the director-general has responsibility for disbursing the funding of the department. She keeps me informed of the issues as they arise. I strongly refute the comment that it is deceitful. The director-general would like to make an additional statement.

Ms Ringrose: Not all carryover funds are finalised at the beginning of the financial year. It may not happen until late July or early August. Sometimes funding has to be taken from the contingency fund because the budget has not finalised with respect to carryovers.

Mr LINGARD: I refer to recent reports that most midsized wineries face a valley of death in terms of profitability. What is the government doing for wineries with a turnover between \$10 million and \$20 million?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. As the member for Beaudesert, he would be aware of the Beattie government's absolute commitment and passion for driving the wine industry of Queensland. The future of Queensland's wine industry, thanks to the passion and commitment of Premier Peter Beattie and the Beattie government, has never looked better.

With the Beattie government's creation of a Wine Industry Development portfolio and the subsequent release of the Wine Industry Development Strategy there is now a clear blueprint to maximise the future potential and profitability of Queensland's thriving wine industry. There are 167 wine producers and wine merchants operating in Queensland's 10 wine regions, spreading from the Granite Belt to north Queensland's fruit wine region. I know that the member has some wineries in his electorate.

In 2001 there were 91 wineries operating in Queensland. All of those, except for probably three, are small to medium sized wineries. This impressive 80 per cent growth rate in the number of winemakers over the past four years has seen dramatic improvements in the quality and reputation of Queensland wines in the national and international wine scene. It also demonstrates that the government is fully committed to working with and supporting the growth of the Queensland wine industry.

One of the biggest issues that we as a government and the industry itself faces is changing the perception of Queenslanders when it comes to Queensland wine. The member would probably share with me my disappointment that when I go to a restaurant, particularly a well-known restaurant, and ask for the wine list and look up and down it for a Queensland wine, there are often none to be seen. I find that a little bit disappointing. I congratulate the growing number of restaurants that are putting Queensland wines on their wine lists. I acknowledge the Restaurant and Caterers Association for its work in supporting the great wineries of Queensland.

The Queensland wine industry's short-term future is now clearly mapped out in the Wine Industry Development Strategy. This has been recognised by the industry and the industry association. The strategy was released in December 2004 after detailed consultation with industry representatives and related stakeholders. I have said to the industry on many, many occasions that it is their strategy. I promised that there would be full consultation and there has been. It is really about the industry driving its own growth with the strong support of the government.

Mrs STUCKEY: I refer to the MPS at pages 1-1 and 1-2, developing the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy. For me growing up in South Australia with three famous winegrowing districts around me, I have to say that I am very pleased to see that the Queensland government has appointed a wine industry development minister. Minister, I asked you last year during estimates and recently again through a question on notice why you still refuse to undertake a basic wine appreciation course when \$249,000 was been allocated for strategy development. As Queensland's very first wine industry development minister is it not important that you have a reasonable understanding of the industry you represent?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. She continues to ask this question. I acknowledge the question, but I think this is probably the fourth time that the question has been asked—whether through a question on notice or through estimates. I think the fact that she continually asks this

question comes down to a basic misunderstanding of the role of the portfolio of Wine Industry Development.

First and foremost I say to the member that the portfolio has been set up by Premier Peter Beattie and the Beattie government to drive the industry. This is an industry portfolio. It is not about the minister enjoying the delights of the Queensland wine industry and its great wineries. That is certainly one of the additional pleasures of the job. I am able to join with the different wineries in recognising the quality of their wines.

I can assure you that I do not believe that any person in Queensland expects their taxes to be wasted on sending the minister for wine industry development on a wine appreciation course. These courses cost a lot of money. They often go over a weekend. I would think it is absolutely outrageous for one cent of Queenslanders' taxes to be spent on sending me, as the minister, on a wine appreciation course. I can assure the member that not one person in my ministerial office and, the director-general has assured me, not one person from the department has gone on a wine appreciation course.

In theory it would not matter whether the minister for wine industry development was a teetotaler or had an expansive cellar of Queensland wine. It is not about sitting around, drinking wine and learning about how great Queensland wine is—we already know that; it is about developing strategies to drive the industry further. That is exactly what the Beattie government is doing. That is exactly what my department is doing through our Wine Industry Development Strategy. I think it is absolutely outrageous that the member continually expects the taxes of Queenslanders to be wasted—and I say wasted—on sending me as the minister on a wine appreciation course.

Mrs STUCKEY: I understand that there is currently a contract in place with regard to which wine is sold in parliament. On the expiration of this contract, what steps if any will the minister take to ensure that Queensland wines are sold through our gift shop at Parliament House and served at functions and in dining rooms? When is the current supplier's contract up for review?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. She, like I, would be very pleased to see such a large number of Queensland wines on the wine list in the dining room. You are correct in that Queensland wines are not available in the gift shop at this stage. I have been advised that the Parliament House souvenir shop sells bottles of wine made by Tyrrell's Wines of the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. The bottled wine has a commemorative Parliament House label affixed.

I have spoken to the Speaker of the Queensland Parliament and I have also written to Mr Hollis asking him to consider offering Queensland wineries the opportunity to tender for the future supply of the Parliament House labelled wine. When the stock runs out I expect that there will be a new tender. At that stage I am very keen for Queensland wineries to have an opportunity to tender for the supply in the souvenir shop.

With respect to Queensland wines in the Parliament House restaurants, the Parliamentary Catering Service, as you would be aware, has an extensive list of Queensland wines for sale. In fact, there are currently 45 Queensland wines available for functions, including sparkling wines, white and red wines, dessert wines and ports. There are also over 100 non-Queensland wines on the list. It really is a very good list. I am sure that when members have visitors—particularly interstate or overseas visitors—they would encourage them to try a Queensland wine, as I do.

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

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I take this opportunity to thank you, minister, and your staff for keeping the electors of Pumicestone informed of the activities of your department. Your updates, particularly on scams, are most welcome. With reference to the launch of the Wine Industry Development Strategy as outlined in the MPS at page 1-17, has any progress been made on the implementation of this? If so, can you provide details?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. I thank her for her kind words when it comes to the Office of Fair Trading keeping electorates up to date on scams. I thank her for promoting those sorts of issues in her local newsletter.

in terms of the Wine Industry Development Strategy, in the last six months since its launch seven strategy actions have already been completed. This is a testament to the collaborative, whole-of-government approach that the Beattie government has taken as well as strong industry commitment and support. Wine industry strategy actions completed to date, I am pleased to say, include the centralisation of all wine licensing and administrative activities within the department's Toowoomba office; the establishment of a dedicated part-time viticulture position within the Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries; the establishment of a wine tourism position at Tourism Queensland; the development of responsible service and consumption of alcohol promotional posters and coasters for use by wineries; the organisation and presentation of a national wine export conference in Queensland—which was very successful; the creation of a new award category of best restaurant wine list featuring Queensland wines at the annual Queensland Restaurant and Caterers Association's awards for excellence to promote the inclusion of Queensland wines on restaurant wine lists; and an enhanced wine industry development web site within my portfolio.

With regard to the National Wine Export Conference, I am happy to inform the member that this event was held on 4 and 5 May this year and was the first ever National Wine Export Conference held in this state. Over 160 delegates attended, including international speakers and interstate delegates. When it comes to the wine industry Queensland is the envy of all states and internationally.

This is not an exhaustive list of the activities that have taken place since the strategy's launch. Work has also begun on many other strategy actions, including actions such as the development of winery-specific directional road signage in Queensland's wine regions. I was proud to launch the 'Welcome to the Granite Belt wine region' signs in April. This is another example of Queensland government departments working together to deliver for our wine industry.

I thank the councils as well. They do a great job helping to promote our wine industry and working with our department. The Department of the Premier and Cabinet is also working with my department to develop export opportunities and export capability within the wine industry.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I have another question for you on the wine industry. Minister, I refer to the MPS at page 1-17 and to participation in local, national and international events. Can you confirm the government's involvement in these events and provide details on Queensland's wine performance, particularly at wine shows?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. Promoting the Queensland wine industry both domestically and internationally is a key element of the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy and also for myself as the responsible minister. Over \$115,000 was spent by my department during 2004-05 through its involvement in wine events, sponsorship and support of trade shows and exhibitions. Over the past year the department has been working with industry members to raise the local, national and international profile of the Queensland wine industry through participation at numerous wine events, exhibitions and festivals.

The Beattie government has proudly been involved in all major wine awards and wine events in Queensland in the past 12 months, including the Brisbane Wine Festival, the Australian Small Winemakers Show, the Winestate Queensland wine awards and the state's own Queensland wine awards. I am pleased to report that Queensland wines have been awarded 15 gold, 46 silver and 254 bronze medals at these shows—an absolutely excellent result and proof that Queensland can stand tall amongst its southern competition. Nationally, Queensland wines received two silver, 31 bronze and two highly commended awards. Internationally, Queensland wine received two gold, five silver, four bronze and three highly commended awards—an excellent result for a developing industry such as Queensland's. Also when you consider that we are competing at the national and international level, the competition is absolutely extreme. We are competing with states and other countries that have had a very mature wine industry for far longer than we have. So we are very proud indeed of those achievements.

To provide you with some of the more outstanding performance of Queensland wines, Symphony Hill Wines from the Granite Belt took out a gold at the Royal Sydney Wine Show in February for the 2003 reserve shiraz. This is the first time a Queensland wine has won a gold medal at this show. At the recent Queensland Winestate wine awards held in May, Whiskey Gully Wines from the Granite Belt took out the trophy for best wine of show for the reserve chardonnay, so very good results indeed. In fact, to enter a wine show, a winery must have an amount of stock to qualify. Generally, the larger and more recognised shows set the highest minimum stock levels. Queensland continues to increase its production each year. This means that more wineries are producing the volume of wine required to enter their wines into state, national and international wine shows. Less than one-third of wines entered in the wine shows win medals, so to be awarded a medal is an excellent measure of the success for Queensland wines against interstate and international competition.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I have a final question on wine. I refer you to MPS page 1-17 and the ongoing implementation of actions contained in the Wine Industry Development Strategy. I understand that one of the goals of the strategy is to promote Queensland wines. Is the government promoting Queensland wine to Queenslanders?

Ms KEECH: We certainly are, as the member would be aware. In fact, promoting the Queensland wine industry to local consumers is indeed a key element of the Queensland Wine Industry Development Strategy and one that is a high priority for me as the minister and also for the department. I am a firm believer that we cannot expect Australia and the world to embrace our wines if we do not embrace them here first, which is why promotion to the Queensland market is so very important. Over the past year my department has been working with industry associations and individual winemakers to raise the profile of the industry through participation at numerous state wine events, exhibitions, trade shows and festivals.

The Beattie government has proudly supported all major wine awards and wine events in Queensland during the past 12 months. Its promotion of Queensland wines to residents of south-east Queensland has been the main focus of a number of events. These include the Woolworths Food and Wine Pavilion at the Brisbane RNA Exhibition which provided Ekka goers the opportunity to sample and purchase Queensland wines, and I really encourage members when they go to the Ekka this year to

look out for our Queensland wines, and the Sofitel/*Courier-Mail* Queensland Wine Awards which judge Queensland wines against each other and again provide Queenslanders with an opportunity to sample our fine wines.

Additionally, my department was pleased to be involved in the extremely successful Queensland Week activities in June promoting Queensland wine. This included Michael's Riverside Restaurant hosting a free public wine tasting involving 20 Queensland wineries, as well as holding a corporate lunch featuring Queensland food and wine. All reports indicated that the day was a huge success, with many Queenslanders visiting the showcase during their lunch hour and over 100 business professionals, media and industry representatives attending the lunch. My sincere congratulations to Michael Platsis for hosting such a successful event and for being a longstanding ambassador and promoter of Queensland food and wine. South Bank restaurants are also great promoters, as are regional hotels in Toowoomba and Kingaroy that conducted a similar promotion during Queensland Week showcasing regional wines and produce. I also give a very big thank you to the Queensland media for the work that they have been doing on promoting Queensland wines. The *Courier-Mail* is absolutely fantastic. Channel 7 and lots of the different channels are putting a lot of extra work into promoting wineries and the wine tourism experience that people can enjoy when they visit our wineries.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, in relation to the Ministerial Portfolio Statement at page 1-17, can you provide details as to what the Queensland wine industry can expect in coming years?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. The future of the Queensland wine industry has never looked better. With the Beattie government's creation of a Wine Industry Development portfolio and subsequent release of our Wine Industry Development Strategy, there is now a clear blueprint to maximise the future potential and profitability of our thriving wine industry. There are currently 167 wine producers and wine merchants operating in Queensland's 10 wine regions spreading from the Granite Belt to north Queensland's fruit wine region. In 2001 there were 91 wineries operating in Queensland. This impressive 80 per cent growth rate in the number of winemakers over the past four years has seen dramatic improvements in the quality and reputation of Queensland wines on the national and international wine scene. There are also 14 wineries exporting to 16 countries, with the most significant exports going to the USA, United Kingdom, Japan and Canada.

With respect to wine varieties that Queensland produces particularly well, verdelho is a standout variety, winning national awards and becoming well regarded across Australia. The total vineyard area now under cultivation in Queensland is more than 1,450 hectares. The recent strong growth of the industry can also be demonstrated by the annual grape crush. Queensland producers crushed less than 500 tonnes of grapes in 1998. The forecast grape crush this year is expected to exceed 5,000 tonnes—a 1,000 per cent increase since 1998. In anybody's language, that is just amazing and the industry really does need to be congratulated. It is a fantastic achievement which is certain to advance over the coming years as the actions contained in the Wine Industry Development Strategy are implemented. It also demonstrates that the government is fully committed to working with and supporting the growth of the Queensland wine industry.

The industry's short-term future is now clearly mapped out in the Wine Industry Development Strategy. I thank in particular the Queensland Wine Industry Association and its members for their tremendous support and lead in implementing the government's strategy. To our present President, Mary-Anne Pidcock, and past President, David Russell, and to the executive and committee members, I say thank you very much indeed for working so well with the government.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, I refer to page 1-15 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement regarding the growth of the wine industry. There have been a number of media articles reporting on the oversupply of grapes this year, known as the grape glut, and I ask: has this glut affected the Queensland industry?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question, because it is a very important question. The member is right; recent media articles have reported on the potential oversupply of grapes in southern wine regions such as the Barossa Valley and the Riverland wine region. These reports include that contract grape growers are being offered \$150 a tonne for wine grapes this year when in previous years wine grapes have achieved \$700 to \$800 a tonne. The oversupply of wine grapes has been caused in part by three factors: firstly, a number of farmers converting to grape production from other lower valued crops in the late 1990s; secondly, the rapid expansion of the wine industry, causing some imbalance in supply and demand; and, thirdly, record vintages over the past two years.

However, the good news is that the structure of the Queensland wine industry is different to our southern counterparts and the grape glut has had no impact on the Queensland wine industry. In Queensland there are no contract grape growers that grow fruit for the major wine producers based in southern Australia. The majority of grapes grown in Queensland are crushed locally and used by local wine producers. Until recently, commercial wine producers in Queensland such as Sirromet have been net purchasers of grapes as their own vineyards continue to mature. It is pleasing to note that Queensland is not adversely affected by the reported grape glut in southern Australia and that the future of the Queensland wine industry has never looked better.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, Ministerial Portfolio Statement at page 1-15 refers to supporting the growth of the development of the wine industry in Queensland. As international exports can be a lucrative market, I would think that export is an important target for the Queensland wine industry. Can you tell the committee what the government is doing to focus and encourage the export of Queensland wines?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. The Beattie government through the Wine Industry Development Strategy launched in 2004 is committed to seeing Queensland increase its share of national wine exports. The strategy outlines seven actions to develop and expand export markets for Queensland wineries over the next three years. The Trade and International Operations Division within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet is the lead agency for our exciting export development work and is working closely with my department to help the industry achieve success. Queensland wines, I am pleased to say, are now being exported to 16 countries, including major trading partners such as Japan, the UK, America and Canada.

In 2003-04 nearly 170,000 bottles of Queensland wine were exported compared to 125,000 bottles during the previous year, an increase of 36 per cent. I am confident that future growth will be revealed when export figures for the year ended June 2005 are collated by the department. Showcasing Queensland wines at selected overseas events and during government trade missions is helping to build on our reputation of producing a quality product. Already, six of our export-ready wines created an exciting Queensland presence at an Australia Day promotion in Korea this year. By way of another example, fabulous Queensland food and wine was featured when the Premier visited and hosted the Queensland Week luncheon at the World Expo in Japan during April. This event was a resounding success and featured wines from seven Queensland wineries: Sirromet Wines, Cloverly Estate, Ballandean Estate Wines, Jimbour Wines, Kominos Wines, Robinson Family Vineyard and Albert River Wines.

A further component of the wine industry strategy involves the development of a Queensland wine export cluster in order to convert emerging wine producers into exporters, sharing export knowledge, using mentors and building the capacity of existing exporters. In fact, I was very excited when I visited China through my tourism delegation to note that the Chinese are now particularly keen to enjoy wine at celebrations, and everywhere we went Queensland wine was served. There certainly is a growing interest in Queensland wines, and I think that in the future Queensland wines will have a great potential in the Chinese market. The Beattie government firmly believes there are tremendous opportunities for Queensland wine in export markets, and together with the wine industry we intend to exploit as many opportunities as possible.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The committee will now adjourn for a short break and the hearing will resume at 10.15 am to continue the examination of the Tourism, Fair Trading and the Wine Industry Development portfolio.

Proceedings suspended from 9.59 am to 10.16 am

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee G hearing is now resumed. This session will examine the expenditure estimates for Tourism, liquor licensing and dispute resolution. The question before the committee is that the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development be agreed to. Departmental witnesses are reminded to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript. I call the member for Beaudesert.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, last year I criticised the department for having the least increase in the tourism budget for all states of Australia. If we look at MPS page 2-6 it shows that the actual amount spent is \$43.376 million and that your estimate for 2005-06 is \$43.394 million. If you take into account other revenue, you actually end up with \$7,000 less this year than last year. Are you telling the Queensland public that this year you intend to spend less on tourism than last year? Why have you not been able to gain a significant increase?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. I particularly wish to make a couple of comments with respect to the tourism budget. This year there is record based funding for Tourism Queensland. In fact, there is another \$5 million for the RTOs and convention bureaus. There is also funding of \$500,000 to develop a tourism development action plan for Cape York and there is more money for stage 2 of the Drive Tourism program. Additionally, for regional Queensland there is \$750,000 over three years for an outback Queensland marketing and development program—great news for the outback and the people of Queensland.

In fact, Mr Chairman, can I say that no other state or territory has matched the Beattie government's commitment to the tourism industry. Tourism is Queensland's second largest export industry and provides employment for more than 150,000 Queenslanders, that is, nine per cent of the work force. As you would be aware, Premier Peter Beattie is an absolutely passionate supporter of tourism, as I am. The Beattie government's funding and support for tourism remains as strong as ever. The level of the government's commitment is not determined only by allocations to its tourism marketing

body. The commitment is shown by its support for the industry both directly and indirectly. On both these fronts the Beattie government shines.

For the member's information, Tourism Queensland has recorded—and I say again—yet another record based budget in 2005-06 of \$40.21 million. Additional special purpose funding of \$3.19 million has been allocated for business events, Drive Tourism, the outback and Cape York to take the total contribution this financial year to \$43.4 million. In comparison with other years, let me say that the Beattie government's commitment to the tourism industry and the tourism sector is ongoing; it is very strong indeed. Tourism Queensland will spend \$31.7 million promoting Queensland in domestic and international markets in 2005-06. This includes an estimated \$10.3 million generated from approximately 400 industry partners through the cooperative marketing program, and I thank those industry sectors and particularly those industry partners—the whole 400 of them—who have contributed the \$10 million towards our cooperative marketing program.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, that is the sort of answer you gave me last year. If you refer to page 2-6 of your MPS, last year you spent \$113.984 million with everything—revenue and budget. This year you plan to spend \$113 million or 0.977. That is clearly less than you spent last year. Will you tell me why you plan to spend less this year than you actually spent last year?

Ms KEECH: For the member's information, if we are looking at the state contribution, the state contribution this year is higher than last year. Also for the member's information, in 1998-99 the Beattie government provided an all-time record level of funding to TQ of \$47.1 million including special initiative funding in response to the Asian economic crisis. This compares with a cash grant of \$45.9 million in 1997-98, which was the last year of the coalition government. So that ends that furphy about which government is more supportive of tourism, and clearly it is the Beattie government. I would welcome a response from the CEO of Tourism Queensland, Mr Ian Mitchell.

Mr Mitchell: Yes, the MPS outlines a figure which was provided as part of the MPS prior to the licensing of the Sunlover Holidays to AOT. The figure there, that \$114 million, actually includes income of commissions generated through Sunlover so, in fact, the revised budget for Tourism Queensland will rise by \$4 million post the Sunlover Holiday licensing. So on a true apple-to-apple comparison it will change from \$53 million to \$57 million this year, a \$4 million increase.

Ms KEECH: Also for the member's information, support for the tourism industry comes not only through direct funding to Tourism Queensland. It also comes through a whole range of infrastructure that is provided by the Beattie government to support the tourism industry and to promote international tourism in particular. This ensures that when visitors come to Queensland they have plenty of product to spend money on and plenty of services and infrastructure to ensure they have an enjoyable time. For example, \$152 million for the Millennium Arts Project; \$30.5 million for tourism and hospitality training through TAFE, because it is all very well having the product and having a strong industry but we also need to be providing training and jobs to ensure that we do have young people coming through who can provide services in hospitality; \$11.2 million for the Lexmark Indy; and \$8.14 million for the Mackay convention project. The Beattie government's commitment to the tourism industry is ongoing. It is taken very seriously indeed and it takes into account not only direct funding for Tourism Queensland but also a whole range of infrastructure and additional services that support the tourism industry of Queensland.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, what reduction in staff numbers of Tourism Queensland has occurred as a result of the licensing of Sunlover Holidays and Queensland Travel Centres to a Victorian company. What performance measures have been put in place to measure whether this approach improves the Queensland tourism industry?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. Staffing levels at Tourism Queensland have changed considerably over the last 12 months and this is primarily due to a couple of things—Tourism Queensland's realignment in October 2004 and, as the member has indicated, as a result of negotiations with a private tourist operator to license Tourism Queensland's commercial division. TQ has not actively recruited but rather filled vacant full-time equivalent positions with temporary staff.

Tourism Queensland's staffing levels may vary throughout the year with variations largely due to seasonal fluctuations in the commercial division. In fact, the average staffing level during the year was 467 full-time equivalents. For example, leading up to the Christmas holidays, there is a need for additional staff.

With respect to AOT, for the member's information, and as I indicated in my second reading speech in parliament, the impact on staff numbers and entitlements was something I clearly focused on in discussions with respect to the licensing arrangements for the commercial division. Consultation was also undertaken with the Queensland Public Sector Union with respect to the impact on staff numbers. Following this consultation, a ruling was obtained from the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission exempting TQ from any requirement to make redundancy payments on the transfer of staff to AOT. That meant that when staff moved from the commercial division to AOT they would lose none of their benefits and certainly there would be no loss whatsoever. With respect to numbers, in total 328 staff transferred to AOT. This included 15 staff from Tourism Queensland's corporate services area. There has been no

Tourism Queensland employee who transferred to AOT who was disadvantaged and I am advised that there have been, to answer the member's question, no job losses at all.

The member for Beaudesert also asked about management of performance. Key performance indicators embedded in the licensing agreement will encourage a growth in business, thereby potentially benefiting all operators. Commercial division staff went to Sunlover Holidays not to the Victorian company.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, in response to my questions on notice to you about the effect that the Japanese plans to kill more whales may have on our important whale watching industry, you advised that you have written to the federal Minister for Small Business and Tourism and that the Queensland government will continue to monitor future attempts by nations to undertake commercial whale hunting. I ask: in light of the significant resources available to you and as identified in your portfolio statements, why will you not, as the minister responsible for Queensland Tourism, raise this matter directly with the Japanese government given their reported intentions to continue killing whales which may pass along our shoreline? Do you need a resolution from parliament to support your taking this sort of action?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question and I thanked him for asking it of me in parliament, and I do commend him for his passion with respect to saving the whales. As I indicated in parliament after he raised the question, I did write to my federal colleague the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, Fran Bailey, outlining the importance of the whale watching industry to the Queensland tourism industry. As the member would be aware, it is a very important industry and we have had a good season with great pods of whales. He, like I, would be concerned that, given the Japanese fishing industry's absolute commitment to continue and to expand their killing and hunting of whales, it does provide real challenges for the sustainability of our industry. Not only that, as tourism minister I am really concerned about the sustainability and the growth of our tourism industry when it comes to whale watching. On the other hand, I think it is downright cruel to be killing these wonderful, wonderful mammals that have a right to exist in our waters.

Regarding the question of why will I not go and speak to the Japanese government, I guess that is because I am a state minister; I am not John Howard. Those sorts of negotiations should rightfully be done through the appropriate channels. I know that the member is absolutely genuine, committed, compassionate and sincere about ensuring that this issue is raised through the appropriate channels to get the very best action. I certainly would not be doing anything to contradict this. I am pleased, in fact, that the federal government has pushed the issue through to try to get a resolution from the Japanese government to cease its hunting and killing of whales. Unfortunately, at this stage we have not been successful, but I do commend the government and the environment minister for their actions.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, with respect, there are significant resources available to you in the portfolio statements, which we are scrutinising at the moment. The Premier's response when I asked this question of him was very similar to your answer: he was simply saying that it is a matter for the federal government and that you have done the best you can. Regularly we hear about how ministers of the state government are out there speaking with their equals in other states and other countries about issues of importance to Queensland. This is a very important issue for Queensland. Do you need a motion from the parliament to give you that opportunity to hop on a plane, travel to Japan and speak to someone over there about this very real issue? Japanese tourists in Queensland are saying to us Queenslanders that they share our sentiments and that they are looking to us to lead and to take the issue back to Japan.

Ms KEECH: Thank you for the question and I do commend you on your passion. Again, I believe that these are sensitive issues for the Japanese government, and I think the best way for us to resolve those is to work through the appropriate channels. I am not too sure that the Queensland minister for tourism jumping on a plane and going over to the Diet in Tokyo and bashing on the door of the Japanese Prime Minister would get us anywhere. I do commend the Commonwealth government on its actions. I know it is an issue that the Premier himself is following very closely. In fact, as I indicated, I have written to Fran Bailey.

Given the member's passion, it is something that I would be keen to take up when we have our Tourism Ministers' Council meeting. It is coming up soon in Hobart. I would be happy to put it on the agenda. I think that would probably be the most appropriate way to progress the issue from two points of view—from an environmental perspective it is important and it is also important for the sustainability of our tourism industry. I thank the member for his passion and I would be happy to write to the chair of the Tourism Ministers' Council, who is Fran Bailey, a lady whom I have a lot of respect for. Perhaps the coalition and the Liberal Party here in Queensland may be able to support you by supporting this issue being put on the agenda for the Tourism Ministers' Council meeting in Hobart.

Mr WELLINGTON: Thank you, Minister.

Ms KEECH: You are very welcome.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, page 1-4 of the MPS refers to Liquor Licensing offices located in Brisbane and nine regional centres in Queensland and the wide range of duties that these staff are

required to perform. What resources are available to ensure that Liquor Licensing staff are able to spend about three-quarters of their rostered time in the community, policing the sale of alcohol, and not in the office simply processing paperwork?

Ms KEECH: Thank you for the question. Member for Nicklin, given that we are presently dealing with the tourism section, if you would not mind, I am happy to take that question and respond later.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, following the Sunlover question from the honourable member for Beaudesert, as the agreement between Tourism Queensland and AOT had not been finalised at the time that the Ministerial Portfolio Statement was printed—and I refer to page 2-6 of the MPS and note 1—the 2005-06 budget does not include the possible financial effects of the transaction. I ask the minister if she could now provide this information on the financial effects of the licensing of Sunlover Holidays to Australian Outback Travel and outline how this will affect the smaller tourism operators?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. As she has rightly indicated, and the CEO of TQ has also indicated, because the MPS was printed before the bill passed through parliament the licensing agreement changes are not reflected in the MPS. With respect to the direct benefits of the operators with the licensing agreement, I would like to list for members some of the expectations that I have for the operators, and the great majority—in fact, all of them—are small to medium operators. So these benefits include all operators being able to continue to distribute their products through the licence; expanded opportunities for distribution through the AOT group's additional distribution network, particularly through the internet; operators having better access to distribution opportunities both domestically and internationally; and the new licensees are looking at opportunities to expand the Queensland product range through various channels of distribution. Key performance indicators embedded in the agreement encourage growth of the business and therefore potentially benefit all operators.

These key performance indicators provide an incentive for AOT to grow the Sunlover brand. The amount paid in licensing fees is linked to Sunlover's growth, with a lower fee payable as AOT grows Sunlover. In addition—and this comes from the discussions that the chair of Tourism Queensland, Mr Jackman, had with groups of operators—there will be a two-year moratorium on changes to the brochure range and commission structure. Operators will also benefit indirectly through the extra investment in international markets Tourism Queensland will be able to make with the licensing income.

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

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, to follow on from what you have just outlined on the licensing agreement, pages 2-2 and 2-6 of the MPS and particularly notes 1 and 2 refer to the negotiations for the licensing of a commercial division of Tourism Queensland, which you have already touched on. Can you update us on the actual arrangement and how it will impact on the tourism industry?

Ms KEECH: Thank you, and I am very happy to do this because it is a very important new stage for the Queensland tourism industry. A new era in the distribution of Queensland tourism products has begun with the licensing from 1 July of Sunlover Holidays and the Queensland travel centres to the AOT group. This is a great result for Queensland's tourism industry. The licensing arrangement follows extensive negotiations over a six-month period and a rigorous due diligence process covering commercial and operational objectives. I emphasise that the transaction is a licensing arrangement for a five-year period with the option to renew for another five years and not a sale of a commercial division, as some opposition and Liberal members claimed during the second reading debate.

The government's key objectives in the negotiations were to ensure that Queensland's tourism industry and visitation to Queensland continued to grow, that Tourism Queensland employees who transferred to the new operator were not disadvantaged, that Queensland operators had an opportunity for their products to be distributed internationally, that the government received value for money and that there was a transfer of future risks.

The AOT group established a Brisbane based subsidiary, SL Holidays Pty Ltd, as a licensed entity. The benefit to Queensland, as I have indicated, from the licensing agreement is through savings from the transfer of Tourism Queensland's corporate services staff to SL Holidays and licensing income, the amount of which is commercial-in-confidence. What I can say, however, is that the substantial income generated will be invested in attracting more international tourists to Queensland, creating more tourism jobs for Queenslanders, particularly in the electorate of Keppel.

The substantial income generated will be allocated directly towards marketing, with the objectives of building destination demand and visitation from key overseas markets, particularly China. In fact, on my visit to China earlier this year it became very clear to me that the potential for the China market is absolutely outstanding. This will help to grow the market for all operators and distributors. There is also an incentive for AOT to grow the Sunlover brand. The amount paid in licensing fees is linked to Sunlover's growth. In addition, there is a two-year moratorium on changes to the brochure range and commission structure.

Another real benefit of this proposal is the freeing up of TQ to focus on its core business of marketing and development of Queensland's tourism industry. As I said, this licensing deal is a good result for the tourism and the tourism industry of Queensland.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Thank you, Minister. Minister, on page 2-6 of the MPS we see the Beattie government contribution to Tourism Queensland. Is it correct that this budget includes record base funding for Tourism Queensland?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. The answer to the question is, yes, it is. I seek to dispel some of the myths about the level of funding for tourism in Queensland. In 1998-99 the Beattie government provided an all-time record level of funding to TQ of \$47.1 million, including special initiative funding in response to the Asian economic crisis. That budget compares with a cash grant of \$45.9 million in 1997-98, the last year of the coalition government. The opposition Liberals claim every single year that they hit the tourism high mark. I would like to set the record straight. Each year they claim that we have slashed tourism funding. Each year their claims are wrong, quite frankly. Each year they question the commitment of the Beattie government to tourism.

The only reliable budget figures are those that come from Tourism Queensland. Let me make that point clear. The figures I get from Tourism Queensland clearly show that the Beattie government dug deeper into the Treasury coffers. So let me put the record straight. In 1997-98, TQ received a cash grant of \$45.934 from the National Party coalition. The grant indicated in that year's annual report was \$44.807 million. The difference of \$1.127 million between the two figures is due, I am advised, to changes in accounting policy. The 1997-98 grant included \$5 million of special initiative funding in response to the Asian economic downturn. The Beattie Labor government in its first year matched this funding in 1998-99. It also doubled convention and incentive funding from \$1 million to \$2 million per annum for four years. This brought Tourism Queensland's grant funding in the first year of the Beattie Labor government to \$47.116 million in 1998-99. These are the facts.

This government is committed to tourism, and we are proud of that commitment which is unmatched by other states and territory governments. This year's state budget includes record base funding for Tourism Queensland of \$40.21 million. I think this is constantly where the confusion is—in not understanding the actual funding for Tourism Queensland. There is a difference between base funding and special initiative payments. Additional special purpose funding of \$3.19 million for business events, Drive Tourism, the outback and Cape York takes the government's contribution for that agency this financial year to \$43.4 million. On top of that there is even more, with the Premier announcing just recently \$500,000 a year for three years for the marketing of Brisbane in other states.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I really must thank you—and I probably should have at the start—for your support for tourism, particularly as my electorate covers a very large tourism market. At page 2-4 of the MPS there is a reference to the development of a long-term strategy for the Queensland tourism industry. Can you explain the motivation for the strategy and what stage it is at?

Ms KEECH: I am very happy to do that. I know that the member is a great supporter of the tourism industry in his electorate, and why wouldn't he be as Keppel has some of the most glorious natural assets with so many tourists flocking to your area. In fact, some people say that it is one of the best-kept secrets. But I am sure the member does not want it to be a best-kept secret. I am sure he wants the world to know of all the great attractions that his area has.

Australia's inbound tourism industry is predicted to grow at an annual rate of 5.8 per cent per annum with steady growth in the domestic market over the next 10 years. Queensland, as a preferred destination, is positioned to be one of the biggest beneficiaries and the government and I are absolutely committed to ensure that it does benefit. However, we must be prepared with the appropriate infrastructure, products and services to be able to attract and accommodate this growth and sustain a vibrant industry over time.

To achieve this I have asked my portfolio to develop a new long-term tourism strategy. I am pleased to state that this is the first time that Queensland will have a long-term, 10-year plan for the tourism industry. The strategy will focus on key areas where government and industry can work together to make a practical and measurable difference. It will establish a clear, 10-year vision for tourism in Queensland. It will also identify the key drivers and influences impacting on the industry at present and into the future. The strategy will set challenging but realistic targets and objectives for sustainable tourism growth. It will identify the critical success factors that will achieve targets and objectives for the sector. It will contain an implementation plan that will establish roles and responsibilities, time frames and resources that will make the strategy work for Queensland. We have looked at where we have come from; now we are turning our gaze to where we are going.

Too often strategic plans sit on shelves gathering dust, and I am absolutely determined that this one will not be like that. I have said to Tourism Queensland that I want the strategy to build on our destination management plans. There has been a tremendous amount of work put into those and we want to grow from those DMPs. A steering committee of influential government and industry stakeholders is overseeing development of the strategy with myself as chair. We have already had a couple of meetings and I have been very impressed indeed with the level of contribution and debate from both the industry sector and also from our government agencies.

The composition of the steering committee reflects my commitment that the tourism industry will be a driver and shaper of the strategy. It is a strategy that I want to work on in collaboration with industry so that it will benefit the industry in the long term.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, we have dealt with funding allocations. Page 2-6 of the MPS sets out the Beattie government's funding allocation. But is there another or other gauge of the government's commitment to the industry?

Ms KEECH: Yes, there is and I am happy to speak to the member about that because he knows, as I do, that the funding for Tourism Queensland is only one way—and only one of very, very many ways—that the Beattie government contributes to the tourism industry. He knows, like I know, that we can market Queensland as much as we like, but we have to ensure that when visitors come here—both local visitors and international visitors—we have the infrastructure to support the industry and to support their visit. It is only if they have an enjoyable time that they will they go back home and tell their friends and families about Queensland—about our great destination, the tremendous services we have and also about the infrastructure that we have to support the tourism industry.

I am pleased to inform the member and the committee that for 2005-06 the government will deliver approximately \$985 million to tourism, made up of \$292 million in direct support and \$693 million in indirect support for the industry. This includes record base funding for Tourism Queensland of \$40.21 million, additional special purpose funding of \$3.19 million for business events—Drive Tourism, the outback and Cape York—taking the government's contribution to TQ this financial year to \$43.4 million.

There is a whole other range of budget initiatives to support the tourism industry. For example, of the direct support there is \$2 million for enhanced visitor facilities across the Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service as a state; \$10.9 million for the Queensland Events Corporation, including the Queensland Events Regional Development Program, which absolutely delivers on attracting more visitors to Queensland through the great events that we have, with the Gold Coast Marathon being just one of the latest events that Queensland has hosted. There is also \$30.5 million for tourism and hospitality training delivered by TAFE; \$152 million for the Millennium Arts Project; \$11.2 million for the Lexmark Indy event; \$3.8 million for the Turtle Interpretive Centre at Bundaberg; \$1.48 million for the Port of Airlie Marina Project; and \$100,000 for the Tourism Oriented Policing Unit.

Examples of indirect support by the Beattie government to the tourism industry include \$57.08 million for major improvements to the Cairns airport, seaport and city port; \$20.7 million for the Regional Centres Program; \$7.7 million for aviation funding schemes; \$8.1 million for the Mackay Convention Precinct; and the list goes on and on.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: At page 2-4 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, under the heading 'Future Developments', reference is made to achieving further growth and expansion of the Chinese market into Queensland. Can you advise what strategies are in place to help China and other tourists have a Queensland experience they will remember so they encourage friends and family to visit?

Ms KEECH: Thank you for the question. It is a very important question. As I have indicated, China really is an emerging market. Mr Mitchell can correct me if I am wrong, but I think over the last financial year we have had a 115 per cent increase in the number of Chinese visitors to Queensland. The China market is very important and potentially has great opportunities for our sector. However, rogue inbound tourism operators have the potential to cause considerable damage to our growing markets such as China. I am pleased to say that Queensland has led the way in the battle against these rogues. Queensland put the issue on the national agenda and invited other jurisdictions to join us in the fight. The Queensland parliament passed the Tourism Services Bill 2003. No other Australian jurisdiction has attempted to clean up problems in the inbound tourism industry with targeted legislation like Queensland has. The act demonstrated the government's commitment to promoting positive experiences for tourists and cleaning up our inbound tourism industry by addressing problems including controlled shopping, misrepresentations, overcharging for goods and services, and unconscionable conduct. In consultation with the tourism services industry and federal government agencies, the Office of Fair Trading is gathering intelligence to assist in identifying these rogues and commencing enforcement actions under the Tourism Services Act or the Fair Trading Act 1989. The Office of Fair Trading has implemented a compliance strategy to enforce the Tourism Services Act.

During 2003-04, 46 spot checks were conducted on inbound tour operators. During 2004-05 spot checks were undertaken on 113 operators. The first major activity of the compliance strategy was Operation Charlie Jasmine in October. This comprised staff from my department, the Queensland Police Service, the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs, and Centrelink. It targeted inbound tour operators at the Gold Coast theme parks. I thank those agencies for their cooperation both at the state level with the Queensland police and also at the Commonwealth level. I have indicated to the Commonwealth's tourism minister, Fran Bailey, my thanks for the cooperation. Together we are working to ensure that we can chase down those rogue operators. Fourteen enforcement undertakings have been sought from inbound tourism operators and associated entities in respect of identified contraventions of the act.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, I refer to your Ministerial Portfolio Statement at page 2-2 under the heading 'Marketing and Development'. Can you advise what Queensland is doing to boost our share of the Chinese tourist market?

Ms KEECH: I can, and again I thank you for a question regarding the China market. As I have said, China is a market of enormous potential for Queensland. I have been advised that currently about 28 million Chinese people travel overseas each year. Of course, Australia attracts only a very small percentage of those—something that the Chinese ambassador recently referred to. Queensland is very keen indeed to attract more Chinese visitors to Queensland.

China is already Queensland's highest-growing market with—and the CEO is absolutely correct—with a 115 per cent increase in visitors between December 2003 and December 2004, or an extra 70,820 visitors. This source comes from the Tourism Research Australia international visitors survey. So it is not TQ's figures. It is predicted that China will be Australia's largest international source market within a decade. However, exploring the full potential that this market has to offer is dependent on establishing non-stop air services between China and Queensland.

Since 2001 the Beattie government has been working to encourage non-stop air access between China and Queensland through TQ's presentation of detailed business cases to key airline executives during delegations to China in 2001, 2002 and 2003. Last year the CEO, Ian Mitchell, met with Traveltrade and airlines with a view to establishing relationships with key airlines that service the Queensland market. I progressed these negotiations in March of this year when I travelled to China and had high-level meetings with airline executives. We sent a strong message that Queensland is serious about attracting Chinese visitors. It was a very productive visit. I had the feeling that the Chinese airlines are certainly very keen to fly to Queensland. I guess it is just a matter of working out their own financial and practical issues. So it is good news for Queensland that China is keen to fly to Queensland.

Tourism Queensland will increase its focus on the Chinese market this financial year. A key initiative has been the establishment of the China advisory panel to develop a five-year strategy to deal with the predicted growth in visitation from the China market. The strategy will look at activities in sales and marketing and how the Queensland industry can develop product to meet the needs of this important market. The advisory panel is expected to be in operation for two years and TQ will undertake broad industry consultation as part of the process.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I now call the member for Nicklin. We are moving on to Liquor Licensing now.

Mr WELLINGTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, if I could repeat the question—

Ms KEECH: Excuse me, would you mind if we swap officers? Thank you for your patience.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, page 1-4 of the portfolio statement refers to the liquor licensing officers located at Brisbane and nine regional centres in Queensland and the wide range of duties that those staff are required to perform. What resources are available to ensure that liquor licensing staff are able to spend at least three-quarters of their rostered time in the community, policing the sale of alcohol, and not in the office processing paperwork?

Ms KEECH: That is an important question with regard to the activities of my Liquor Licensing Division. As you have indicated, this year the division has had a very busy year. The liquor licensing officers in Brisbane and throughout the regions work very hard indeed to ensure the compliance of licensees and the safety of the people of Queensland.

For your information, at 30 June 2005 there were 60 full-time equivalent Brisbane Liquor Licensing Division employees. This comprised 41 permanent employees, 18 temporary employees and one trainee. For the member's information, there are 20 full-time equivalent regional liquor licensing employees. This includes six Indigenous liquor licensing program employees who are located at Cairns and Mount Isa.

With respect to compliance, the Liquor Licensing Division conducts a comprehensive compliance, monitoring and investigation program to ensure the operation of licensed premises is not causing undue annoyance, disturbance or disorderly conduct and that licensees comply with the Liquor Act 1992. Over the past year, my department's Liquor Licensing Division has taken a tougher approach to enforcement—with my strong support—of the Liquor Act 1992 as a direct response to community concerns.

For the member's information, with respect to what percentage of time liquor licensing officers should spend inside and outside the office, that is an operational issue and I refer you to the Liquor Licensing Division Executive Director, Chris Watters, for some comments.

Mr Watters: Currently, as the minister has indicated, we have a range of compliance staff located both here in Brisbane and at our regional centres across the state. Their duties are allocated on a roster system to ensure that we take a risk management approach to a range of compliance issues concerning liquor licensing. For example, on the target nights for inspectors to be out conducting inspections on premises to ensure community safety, to ensure that patrons are behaving appropriately on licensed

premises and certainly to ensure that licensees are carrying out their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the Liquor Act, the roster ensures that on those peak nights—late night Friday and Saturday nights—staff are allocated to those duties.

In respect of their general inspection duties—that is, inspections concerning safety and health, and joint inspections with Fire, Police and other agencies—clearly, those duties are carried out during the day.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, I am concerned about the implementation of alcohol management plans, especially in the Cape York area, without suitable support programs being implemented. When the government introduced the restrictions for alcohol management plans in Cape York, it promised to provide extra facilities to assist with the problems of alcohol—not just the standard facilities provided by each department, which we know should be there. What facilities have been provided by your department in relation to the alcohol management plans?

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question because it is very important indeed. The alcohol management plans, as you are aware, are something the Beattie government is absolutely committed to in order to crack down on the abuse of alcohol in Indigenous communities. Even with the best of intentions, there will always be people who oppose necessary change. This is exactly what we have found has happened in some of our Indigenous communities.

Since the announcement of the introduction of alcohol management plans, my portfolio's responsibility is with respect to the Liquor Licensing Division. In answer to your question regarding additional facilities, I would like to inform you about what we have done. The number of additional staff allocated to Cairns and Mount Isa is actually six all-up—five in Cairns and one in Mount Isa. They are Indigenous liquor licensing program employees. That is one area where we have provided additional facilities.

We now have additional training to encourage harm minimisation practices in licensed premises within Indigenous communities. My department's Liquor Licensing Division has provided training to licensees and nominees in the responsible management of licensed venues. Nine of the 19 identified communities have licensed premises operating within the shire boundaries. In fact, delegates from Lockhart River, Mornington Island and other communities attended the course in May 2005. Delegates provided us with valuable feedback on the key issues facing these remote communities.

In addition, a provision exists that security providers are trained and in attendance on communities. My department has also implemented options to ensure that people in Indigenous communities have the opportunity to obtain training as security providers. This will ensure a safer environment for patrons at licensed premises, as well as increased employment opportunities within the communities.

We have also done work to ensure that issues regarding responsible drinking messages get through. Further to this training, the division sponsors broadcasts on the National Indigenous Radio Service. The messages focus on promoting responsible service and consumption of liquor and the division's 'No more. It's the law' banner. Key messages include community education relating to the negative impact of grog in communities, sly-grogging awareness, promotion of the anonymous Sly Grog Hotline and information about liquor restrictions in Indigenous communities. It has proven to be an effective medium for publicising the division's initiatives.

Mrs STUCKEY: Minister, I refer you to page 1-15 of the MPS relating to the issuing of liquor, wine and adult entertainment licences and permits. The CMC released a report in December 2004 called *Regulating adult entertainment*, which included 29 recommendations including measures to stop the public exploitation of underage girls in unregulated venues such as live peep shows and adult cafes. Which of those 29 CMC recommendations have you implemented and put in place to better regulate live adult entertainment venues and to prevent girls as young as 16 from performing such indecent acts as genital self-penetration and lesbian sex shows?

Ms KEECH: This is a very important issue and I thank the member for raising it. In fact, at the recent community cabinet—the Beattie government and ministers were in attendance at the Gold Coast—I received a deputation from a counsellor and a pastor who raised this very issue. I know that it is an issue of concern within a range of communities, particularly churches. I share their concerns with respect to some of the recommendations in the CMC's report.

For the information of the member and the committee, the CMC's review is simply that. It is, at this stage, a report. In response to the question about what action I have taken with regard to those recommendations, I have actioned none of them. It is a matter for cabinet to decide and it will do that in due time. As I said, I do share some of the concerns of the wider community regarding some of the recommendations.

The government makes policy. It accepts reports from a range of organisations and government agencies. Certainly the CMC review is, at this stage, being fully reviewed and will go to cabinet in due time.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions from non-government members has expired. I now call on the member for Pumicestone.

Mrs Carryn SULLIVAN: Minister, I refer you to page 1-2 of the MPS relating to additional resources for the Liquor Licensing Division. Can you advise of any new initiative allowing the division to enhance its ability to enforce legislation?

Ms KEECH: I am very pleased to inform the member and the committee that the Liquor Licensing Division strives to protect the community from liquor related harm and nuisance while, at the same time, encouraging the economic growth and development of liquor related industries. In the 2005-06 state budget, the Beattie government has provided an additional \$1.1 million in recurrent funding to the Liquor Licensing Division of my department. This will be used to meet the increasing demand for compliance services generated by the extraordinary growth of the tourist, liquor and hospitality industries in Queensland. This funding will provide four extra liquor compliance officers in Brisbane, one on the Gold Coast and one on the Sunshine Coast.

As part of our tough approach to enforcing the Liquor Act, a new four-member flying squad is being established by the Liquor Licensing Division to help stamp out alcohol related incidents and antisocial behaviour on and near licensed premises. I am very pleased to make this announcement to the committee. The team of liquor compliance officers will travel around Queensland to provide increased compliance and enforcement services. This will enable the division to better address liquor licensing issues in regional Queensland and more quickly respond when concerns arise.

The new squad will have a senior team leader and will comprise three additional officers. They will be equipped with noise testing and other relevant equipment. They will be supported by a substantial travel budget. The key target areas for the new squad will be compliance with tough new licence conditions, the government's statewide advertising ban, responsible service of alcohol, drinking competitions and other promotions or activities that lead to or encourage binge drinking. Patron and community safety on and near licensed premises will be a key focus.

The special operations team will be based in Brisbane and will regularly travel to the regions to roll out special liquor inspections and joint operations with local staff from the Department of Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development, the police and Queensland fire services. It is expected that the team will visit the Gold Coast monthly, the Sunshine Coast every two months and Ipswich, Toowoomba and the northern centres—Wide Bay, Rockhampton, Townsville and Cairns—every three months. The team will commence operations on 1 August 2005. I know that regional members will welcome this announcement by the Beattie government.

Ms CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, I refer you to page 1-17 of the MPS, 'Future Developments'. I am aware of the differences between entertainment and resident interests in Fortitude Valley over noise which have caused ongoing problems. Can you provide some further detail on these issues?

Ms KEECH: I certainly can, and I am very pleased to speak about the valley precinct. In fact, there has been no special solution to addressing problems of noise associated with entertainment venues and residents and businesses for almost six years. I am very pleased to have played a part in addressing this problem in the valley. I thank Councillor David Hinchliffe, Minister Desley Boyle, our departmental staff, licensees, residents and other stakeholders for the roles that they have played.

The announcement of the valley as a special entertainment precinct is a win-win for everybody. It has been achieved through a commonsense approach and a willingness by all parties to compromise. It will ensure the continued vitality and colour of the valley and its unique standing in the live music scene. We are paving the way for the development of a world-class entertainment precinct in the valley. The Liquor Licensing Division, the department of local government and the Brisbane City Council have developed a legislative and policy framework for statewide application. We will amend five state and Brisbane City Council laws to allow declarations of a special entertainment precinct in the valley—a first for Queensland and, I am told, a first for Australia. We have also had a lot of international interest in this announcement of the special entertainment precinct for the valley.

The amendments to the laws will allow the valley to have specific noise levels for entertainment venues and will identify areas in which stricter noise insulation requirements will apply for new residential buildings and new venue development. Responsibility for noise regulation of music venues will be transferred from the Liquor Licensing Division to the Brisbane City Council. However, the designation of an entertainment precinct is not a blank cheque for venues to emit unlimited levels of noise. The valley remains a mixed use community and, therefore, a degree of compromise will be required on all sides.

There has already been extensive consultation to encourage discussion on key issues and proposals for solutions going back for six years. So I am really very pleased to have played a role to be at this stage where instead of focusing on the problems we are now focusing on the solutions.

Just last week Councillor Hinchliffe and I jointly launched a new consultation kit providing further opportunities for residents, businesses and musicians to comment on the proposed changes. The kit outlines proposed changes to the Liquor Act, the Local Government Act, the Brisbane City Plan, the

Queensland Development Code and the Brisbane City Council Entertainment Venues and Events Local Law. Public submissions close on 19 August, so I encourage people to contact the Brisbane City Council on their web site or the council's discussion forum web site, which is www.brisbane.qld.gov.au. A give a special thankyou to Q Music, which has worked so well with both the government and the council in delivering this exciting initiative.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS relating to harm minimisation initiatives undertaken by your Liquor Licensing Division. I believe that the division, licensees and the liquor and hospitality industries have been working together to develop a code of practice. Could you please provide details of this code?

Ms KEECH: Yes, I certainly can. In fact, I will be launching the new code to the industry next week and the committee has a sneak preview of it. The code, which will have a statewide effect, provides a proactive whole-of-government approach to ensure that liquor is served, supplied and promoted responsibly. It sets out universal guidelines for use by the Liquor Licensing Division, licensees, permittees and their staff to identify and control the risks associated with a promotion. The code encourages the creation of a safe, secure and social environment for patrons of licensed premises to minimise harm to individuals in the broader community. It is based on the Australian Alcohol Guidelines, published by the National Health and Medical Research Council. It also supports the government's Queensland Alcohol Action Plan in its objectives to prevent and reduce harm associated with alcohol misuse.

It sets out the legal obligations of licensees to maintain a safe environment for patrons and staff on the premises and ensuring that liquor is served, supplied and promoted responsibly in order to preserve the peace and good order of the neighbourhood of the premises. The code commits the industry to assessing risks associated with alcohol promotions before the activity starts. It also develops management plans where high risk is identified. It commits the industry to not conducting promotions and practices if there is an unacceptable risk or any high risk that cannot be adequately controlled. The code also commits the industry to immediately cease any practice or promotion if patrons consume liquor rapidly or excessively or engage in unsafe behaviour. The code includes guidelines relating to consumption rate, consumption level, consumption discounting, time frame related activities and patron safety. It sets out what is acceptable and unacceptable practice or promotions. For instance, acceptable practices might include competitions with prizes of food, meal deals or other non-liquor prizes; supply of liquor in standardised quantities; promotions involving low-alcohol liquor; and helping patrons arrange transport from the premises. Unacceptable practices include drinking competitions; using containers that encourage rapid or excessive consumption; the promotion of drink cards; and unlimited liquor consumption such as 'all you can drink'. I would particularly like to thank a whole range of industry associations that have helped with the development of the code of practice. I will just mention them: Restaurant and Catering Queensland, Clubs Queensland, RSL and Services Clubs Association, the QHA, the Queensland Wine Industry Association, the Surfers Paradise Licensed Venues Association, Carlton & United Beverages, Club Training Australia, the Alcohol Tobacco and Other Drugs Unit, Queensland Health and the Drug and Alcohol Coordination Unit of the Queensland Police.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I now call upon the member for Beaudesert.

Mr LINGARD: Minister, what are the ongoing training programs in dispute resolution and judicial skills each member of the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal received in 2004-05? What training programs are to be provided in 2005-06?

Ms KEECH: Your question was with respect to dispute resolutions in general or just with respect to the CCT?

Mr LINGARD: Just the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal.

Ms KEECH: I am pleased that you asked the question because the Commercial and Consumer Tribunal does an absolutely excellent job. I am very impressed indeed with the diligence in which the members and the officers perform their duties. As I said, this year has been a very busy year for the tribunal. The tribunal commenced operations on 1 July 2003 and now deals with approximately 1,300 applications each year across 13 jurisdictions. For additional information regarding training I will refer to Brian Bauer.

Mr Bauer: I am not quite sure whether the question was directed at internal training or training amongst our client groups.

Mr LINGARD: The internal training.

Mr Bauer: There is a range of internal training, particularly for registry staff members, to deal with applicants and people who are going through the system. We have concentrated very, very strongly this year on teamwork towards excellence. We try to inspire a culture of excellence within the organisation in dealing with applicants. That training has impressed upon staff the importance of dealing with people objectively and also in a forthright manner. We have run workshops on that and also, just momentarily concentrating on the external perspective, we constantly review our web sites and make sure that the

information in terms of the processes that people have to go through within the system are very clear and as user friendly as possible, particularly given that we are very aware that approximately 79 per cent of our clientele are self-represented. So we are very careful to ensure that staff have the necessary skills to deal with those people in an appropriate manner.

Ms KEECH: Just following on from that, I indicate that the membership of the tribunal is made up of a mix of legally qualified members and suitably experienced laypersons, as the honourable member would be aware. This makes use of both legal skills and experience to ensure that tribunal members make informed decisions on cases before the tribunal.

Mr LINGARD: Can I extend that question then to the appointment of the adjudicators in the Body Corporate and Community Management Act. What is the actual experience in the management of a body corporate possessed by each adjudicator prior to their appointment generally? What training programs does each adjudicator undergo on a regular basis into the management of a body corporate?

Ms KEECH: I appreciate the question. The body corporate and community management office does a terrific job. In fact, during 2004-05, 1,084 applications were received with 747 being resolved by an adjudicator's order. For the member's information, currently there are six adjudicator positions within the office. Of the six current adjudicators, five have law degrees. The final adjudicator has a Bachelor of Business in Accounting and extensive experience with body corporate legislation. So all the adjudicators either have a law degree or significant academic qualifications as well.

Departmental adjudicators are required to have proven experience in litigation, alternative dispute resolution and/or adjudication. They are also required to have demonstrated superior knowledge, or ability to acquire such knowledge, of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act 1997 and its dispute resolution procedures. The act also allows for specialist adjudicators, conciliators and mediators to be appointed by the commissioner for individual dispute resolution applications. Specialists are nominated by and paid for by the parties. However, the commissioner will appoint a nominated specialist only if they have the appropriate qualifications, standing and experience to undertake the role.

In addition, all departmental and specialist adjudicators are bound by the principles of conduct for adjudicators within the Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management. These principles include respect for the law, fairness, independence, respect for others, diligence and efficiency, integrity, accountability and transparency.

For the member's information, the office aims to resolve 80 per cent of applications within 60 days of the close of the applicant's reply to submissions. During 2004-05, 74.5 per cent of applications were resolved within this time frame.

Mr LINGARD: I heard you refer in your introductory comments to the continuing review of the BCCM legislation. When do you feel that it will be finished because, quite honestly, it has been going for a very, very long time.

Ms KEECH: The member is correct. I have referred to the review of the act and I have to say I have been very pleased indeed with the progress. Like you, I am keen for the review of the act to be finalised. However, I have given an indication to the industry stakeholders that before making any final decisions I would like to meet formally with them. Since I have been minister I have had a range of meetings with the industry stakeholders, but to date I have not been able to get them all together as a group and to meet formally with respect to the review. I think it would be improper for me to finalise the whole review without having an opportunity to have that meeting. I am hopeful that that meeting will be held relatively soon and from that, after listening to their issues and raising the 177 responses that we received from the discussion paper, I will be in a position to finalise the review and to take my final paper to cabinet.

Mr Chairman, I note that the member for Currumbin has left the committee, but she did ask me to follow up on a response regarding the Ekka sideshow. By leave could I just give a response to that?

CHAIR: Yes.

Ms KEECH: With respect to the issue that she raised regarding sideshow alley games, I think most consumers participate in sideshow alley games as a form of amusement and entertainment and not as a serious competition. Sideshow alley games often come down to luck rather than skill and that is all part of the fun. However, my department does take breaches of Fair Trading legislation very seriously indeed and is committed to taking appropriate action against any trader found to be in breach of this legislation, for example, misrepresenting the chances of winning a prize.

A game operating at the Brisbane exhibition in August 2004 involved players throwing a ball through a hoop. A professional netball player achieved 11 out of 80 shots. This matter was drawn to my department's attention by the *Courier-Mail*, and I thank the *Courier-Mail* for their action. No complaints were made by consumers about the operation of this game. As the game had a sign stating that a non-regulation ring was used, this was a clear attempt on the part of the stallholder to inform consumers and, therefore, the stallholder was not deliberately deceiving or misleading players.

During this year's Brisbane exhibition, Office of Fair Trading inspectors will be visiting the show again to ensure that consumers are not at risk from unsafe products, short weight or measure and will also visit sideshow alley to ensure traders are not misrepresenting the operation of games of chance.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by non-government members has expired. I now call upon the member for Keppel.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, in relation to your earlier comments regarding the discussion paper titled *Body Corporate and Community Management: into the 21st Century*, which is referred to on page 1-21 of the MPS, can you outline for the committee the current status of that body corporate legislation?

Ms KEECH: Yes. I thank the member for the question as a follow-up from a question asked by the member for Beaudesert. It is a really important question. The review of the Body Corporate and Community Management Act is important given that there are 30,000 community living schemes and 300,000 individual lot owners in Queensland with many more schemes on the drawing board. Many members of the committee would have these schemes in their own electorate. Given that we are expecting more than one million Queenslanders just in south-east Queensland over the next 20 years, I know that community living will be attractive to these new residents of Queensland.

In the Body Corporate and Community Management Act review the department found that while Queensland was regarded as a leader in community living policy and legislation, there was a need for government to ensure it had a forward-looking policy agenda. This is because community living is important for the tourism sector and is becoming a rapidly increasing lifestyle and accommodation choice. It is an important contributor to Queensland's current economic growth.

I subsequently released the discussion paper the member referred to on 10 July 2004. The department received 177 written submissions. I am pleased to advise the committee that the government has now endorsed a range of significant improvements to the BCCM office information and dispute resolution services through the allocation of an additional \$1.6 million for these services as a post-budget initiative.

This is an increase of a very pleasing 133 per cent on the existing budget for BCCM services. I thank the Treasurer and Premier for that. There will be a strong focus on education and information. The government will also fund a departmental conciliation service as a first step in dispute resolution. I will meet with key stakeholders in the near future to discuss a number of ways to improve the current policy framework, including the strengthening of prepurchase contract warnings.

I am also keen to discuss the development of a statewide program of regular public information seminars. That is something that the BCCM office is already conducting. We are very keen for that to continue. Following my discussions with stakeholders I intend to bring a bill forward later this year which will contain legislative amendments that will formally recognise the role of tourism in the BCCM industry and reflect the dynamic era the industry is currently entering. This bill will be presented to cabinet before it is taken to parliament. I will have to wait for cabinet's decision on the bill. I will not pre-empt cabinet's decision.

These initiatives will also provide an opportunity for lot owners to have access to a low-cost and accessible jurisdiction without the need to pay for lawyers or to incur other unnecessary costs. I have been advised that the meeting with stakeholders is set down for sometime in August.

Mr HOOLIHAN: To go further in relation to page 1-21 of MPS, can you outline for the committee how effective your department has been in dealing with dispute resolution applications in this financial year? You mentioned that there had been an increase.

Ms KEECH: I thank the member for the question. I am very pleased to do that. The Office of the Commissioner for Body Corporate and Community Management delivers cost-effective dispute resolution services under the BCCM Act for people living, working or investing in community title schemes. Demand for the services of the commissioner's office has substantially increased in recent years. This corresponds with increases in the number of community title schemes in Queensland.

There are over 30,000 community title schemes in Queensland, as I have indicated. Annual growth is approximately 1,000 new schemes each year representing some 8,000 to 10,000 new lot owners. The Beattie government recognises the need for timely dispute resolution for the community titles industry and has allocated an additional \$0.5 million in recurrent funding in the recent budget to assist in meeting these increased service demands.

At the beginning of this financial year, 336 applications were on hand to be determined as a flow-on from 2003-04 with 1,084 applications received during 2004-05. This was an increase of six per cent from the previous year. Applications comprise 871 for final orders and 213 for interim orders. Some 1,136 applications were resolved during 2004. Of these, 253 were withdrawn, 130 were rejected, six were mediated and 747 were resolved by an adjudicator's order. This exceeded the agency's estimated 2004-05 application resolution target of 990 matters by 146 applications, or 14.7 per cent. I commend the office and its staff for their hard work and the successful outcomes.

As at 30 June 2005 there are 284 applications on hand at various stages of the dispute resolution process. The BCCM office aims to resolve 80 per cent of applications within 60 days of the close for the applicant's reply to submissions. Some 74.5 per cent of applications were resolved within this time frame in 2004-05.

This is an excellent result considering process delays are not always within the control of the BCCM office. Delays can be caused by the failure of one party to quickly respond to requests for information, or to make submissions, or to reply to submissions. The average time taken to resolve disputes was 35 working days, or seven weeks from the date on which the reply submissions closed. In 2004-05 the average time taken to resolve an application from the date of lodgment was approximately four months.

Mr HOOLIHAN: To follow on somewhat from that, at page 1-21 of the MPS there is reference to mediation services. Can you tell the committee how effective the mediations services of your department were this financial year?

Ms KEECH: Yes, I certainly can. The Commercial and Consumer Tribunal has the power under the CCT act and a range of empowering acts to refer matters to mediation. Mediation is used as an effective and successful way of resolving disputes. The CCT has achieved outstanding success, particularly in its mediation function, saving tribunal clients and the taxpayer significant expense. I thank the chairperson, the members and the staff of the CCT. They do an absolutely wonderful job. The success rate is here for all to see.

Between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2005, 593 domestic and minor commercial building disputes were mediated, with 70 per cent of domestic building disputes and 83 per cent of commercial building disputes successfully resolved. The average time taken to finalised domestic or minor commercial building disputes by mediation during the year was 62 days.

The process of mediation is not compulsory under the act, but parties are strongly encouraged to participate. Parties are certainly not compelled to sign an agreement and it is up to the individual to decide whether they wish to take the matter further to formal hearings or to agree to a mediated settlement. Mediators appointed by the tribunal are appropriately qualified and are carefully selected to ensure that they have the right mix of mediation skills and subject knowledge.

This has contributed significantly to the high success of mediated outcomes. When you get the right people with the right skills there is success with mediation. The tribunal mediates and determines matters it is empowered to deal with in a way which is just, fair, informal, cost efficient and timely. I commend tribunal chairperson, Julie-Anne Schafer, and tribunal sessional members and staff for their efforts in the past 12 months.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Tourism, Fair Trading and Wine Industry Development. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and her advisers for their attendance today.

Ms KEECH: Before we close, Mr Chairman, I thank you, the member for Keppel, the member for Pumicestone, the member for Ipswich West, opposition and non-government members, the staff and the research director for their assistance in investigating the appropriations of my department today. I would particularly like to thank all the departmental staff and my director-general for their hard work. Everybody has worked very hard to ensure that I am well prepared to provide the evidence that has been required.

In particular I thank Claire Maconachie from the department and Belinda Carroll from my office for their hard work. I thank the staff of my office who have worked long and hard and on weekends and at nights. I thank Rachel Saunders, the Deputy Director-General, and the executive directors for their work. I also thank Michael Caldwell, David Smith, Ryan Robertson, Danny Low and my administrative and departmental team within my office for their great work in preparing for estimates.

I say to the staff in all of our regional offices that they do an absolutely terrific job. I am very proud to be their minister. I am proud to support them in the work that they do. We do a great job together. We are a great team. We do not get it right 100 per cent of time, but we are certainly there trying to improve. I thank them sincerely for the great work that they do on delivering for the Beattie government.

CHAIR: Thank you for those kind words.

Proceedings suspended from 11.40 am to 11.52 am

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—EMERGENCY SERVICES

In Attendance

Hon. CP Cummins, Minister for Emergency Services

Department of Emergency Services

Mr M Kinnane, Director-General

Mr J Higgins, Commissioner, Queensland Ambulance Service

Mr L Johnson, Commissioner, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service

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

Mr P Clarke, Executive Director, Strategic Policy and Executive

Ms M Smith, Executive Director, Business Support services

Mr G Taylor, Chief Financial Officer

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee G hearing is now resumed. The next portfolio to be examined is Emergency Services. In the event that those attending today are not aware, I point out that the proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard I remind visitors that, in accordance with standing order 286, any person admitted to the public hearing of the committee may be excluded by order of the committee. I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for answers. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents.

Standing orders require that at least half of the time for questions at today's hearing is allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns at asking questions in blocks of equal time. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer a question so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript, and that is quite important. Please also ensure that mobile phones and pagers are switched off while in the chamber so as not to disrupt the proceedings. The time allotted to the portfolio of Emergency Services is 3½ hours, with an hour's break at 12.50 pm.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Emergency Services open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement, or do you wish to proceed directly to questioning? If you do wish to make a statement, the committee asks you that you limit it to only five minutes.

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you, Mr Chairman. I would like to make some opening remarks. My department has more than 7,700 staff and approximately 85,000 volunteers who are very dedicated to making sure that we keep Queensland safe. It is no exaggeration to say that without our huge base of volunteers the Department of Emergency Services would cease to function. I have travelled to all corners of this great state—a number of times to many areas—in my time as minister, and I am very glad to say that the Beattie government is doing the right thing by Emergency Services staff and volunteers. Through this record budget for the 2005-06 year provided by the Beattie government, the department will continue to support, train and safeguard its permanent and volunteer work force. This budget will also allow the development and implementation of flexible service delivery models and strategies to respond to Queensland communities, particularly in rural and remote areas. Key components in this will be the accelerated roll-out of the iZone program to enhance fire safety in the rural fringes of urban communities and the enhancement of volunteer capacity through the volunteer support package.

The Queensland Rescue helicopter service also plays a major role in keeping Queensland safe, so I was delighted this morning to officially launch Queensland Rescue's new \$8 million helicopter. This new machine is a Eurocopter EC-135 and it will provide an enhanced level of aeromedical and air rescue services when backup is required for any of the three rescue Bell 412 helicopters. The 2005-06 state budget also provides \$12.2 million to commence the replacement of the Queensland Rescue Bell 412 helicopter fleet. The \$12.2 million is part of a two-year, \$40.8 million program to replace the three medium twin Instrument Flight Rules, or IFR, Bell 412s based in Brisbane, Townsville and Cairns. Replacement of these helicopters will ensure the continued provision of an effective emergency helicopter service throughout the state, including rural and remote Queensland.

In further good news, the budget also allows for \$7.9 million over three years from 2006-07 for the upgrade of aeromedical and air rescue helicopter services in the Torres Strait and northern peninsula area of Queensland. These funding allocations all come from the government's eighth consecutive record Emergency Services budget. The total Department of Emergency Services budget is

\$667.5 million and it will give all Queenslanders better access to world-class fire, ambulance and counterdisaster and rescue services. Central to this year's budget is a record capital expenditure allocation of \$110.4 million, and a key feature is the enhancement of the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy, or QCESA, at Whyte Island in Brisbane. The academy will be developed into a national and international centre for excellence for emergency management training and community safety. Some \$20 million over three years will deliver a new breathing apparatus and training facility for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and an operational scenario village for multiservice training.

The tragic events in London over a week ago underline the need for our emergency services teams to receive the best training possible. The 2005-06 Emergency Services budget will also ensure Queensland emergency services have the resources and support to improve services and community safety throughout Queensland. Other highlights of the Department of Emergency Services's budget for 2005-06 include: an additional 70 paramedics as part of our 240 over three years commitment to address growth in demand, maintain emergency response times and improve services to rural, isolated and remote communities; the training of 20 paramedics each year for three years in conjunction with Queensland Health to expand the role of paramedics so they may assist remote area nurses and rural doctors with ongoing patient care; \$7 million for an automated data system to help reduce paperwork by our paramedics and again improve service delivery; \$3.3 million over four years to enhance bushfire capability in the iZone area; \$15 million to continue the redevelopment of the Roma Street joint ambulance and fire facility in Brisbane; \$2.4 million to commence or complete joint emergency facilities at Highfields, Roma and Palm Island; \$13.2 million for new or replacement urban vehicles; \$7.9 million for replacement ambulance vehicles; \$3.8 million for rural fire vehicles; and \$2.5 million for SES flood boats, equipment and trailers.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first round of questions will be from non-government members. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: Thank you, Mr Chairman, and thank you for allowing me to participate in the Emergency Services portfolio of Estimates Committee G. Minister, I refer to page 5 of the MPS and the department's role in developing and supporting our people. I note that there is a wide degree of dissatisfaction with the new roster system by tired ambulance officers who have had to back up for additional days due to the staff shortage caused by the new roster. Minister, has disciplinary action in any form been taken against staff who have dared to speak out against the Ambulance Service roster reform and what form did the disciplinary action take?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. When we talk about roster reform, we talk about improving services to all Queenslanders. We have seen in the far north of the state roster reform implemented, and what has come about from roster reform is improved response times. We want to continue to improve response times. You will find that today I will be mentioning 12 consecutive months of improvements in response times, something that the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Department of Emergency Services—indeed, the whole of the government—should be very proud of. Not only are we rolling out 240 extra paramedics across Queensland over a three-year period, 22 new or refurbished stations and 200 new or refurbished vehicles; we are going to ensure that Queenslanders, wherever they live, continue to have improvements to Queensland ambulance services. How does this come about? This comes about by a thing called the community ambulance cover—something that we on our side of the House were very proud to introduce. Community ambulance cover will ensure that we will continue to have record budgets not only this year but also in coming years.

The roster reform scenario is about two things, and one of them is whether we believe that people should be working 14 hours straight. I understand that you may find it hard to understand 14 hours—

Mr ROWELL: Don't hate me!

Mr CUMMINS: You are the one who asked the question. Fourteen hours is not a good amount of time for anyone to work. Right across the world national studies and international studies have shown that 14 hours is far too long for someone to be working in the role of a job like a paramedic. If your side of the House wants to reintroduce 14-hour rosters, shame on you! I know parents who take children to school at that hour of the morning when you are expecting paramedics to be driving high-speed vehicles after a 14-hour shift. It is absolutely ludicrous. We make no excuse for introducing shorter rosters—that is, down to 10-hour rosters. We will continue to improve response times by roster reform, and I would ask the Queensland Commissioner of the Ambulance Service, Jim Higgins, if he would like to comment on issues relating to anything to do with staff.

Commissioner Higgins: The roster reform process in the Queensland Ambulance Service has been undertaken in full consultation and partnership with our staff and the union that represents paramedics across the state. Roster reform has two principal objectives. The first of those is to ensure that ambulance resources are aligned to the demand profiles of the community, and the evidence in terms of the outcomes of roster reform speaks for itself. Response times have improved. We have reduced the incidence of shift overruns and we have improved access to paramedics' meal breaks and to their rest pauses.

Mr ROWELL: Thank you for the response, but you really did not answer the question about the tired ambulance officers. I have been made aware of their concerns very often. Some of them have been backing up for as many as eight days in a row. Minister, can you advise the committee if this issue has been recently re-examined by the Industrial Relations Commission and what has been the outcome?

Mr CUMMINS: The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission is the independent umpire. Whether it be with regard to the Queensland Counter Disaster and Rescue Services' employment, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service or the Queensland Ambulance Service, the government and my department will always abide by the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission's—the independent umpire's—outcome. The commission supports the Queensland Ambulance Service in the decision that we have taken. It also comprehends that trying to make someone work a 14-hour shift is ludicrous and not viable. I have had paramedics speak to me at social functions. Not only have they said, 'Minister, it is dangerous driving an ambulance vehicle at high speed while mums and dads are taking their kids to school'; they have also told me that they worry that at the end of a 14-hour shift they could be called on to make a life-saving decision—a clinical decision—and that if they made the wrong decision that would haunt them for the rest of their lives.

No one can reasonably expect that someone working a 14-hour shift, in a not only very physical but very mental job, could do better. It is a job in which you are constantly on the go, you are constantly making decisions, you are working in life-and-death situations and 14 hours is just far too long. This is acknowledged not only across Australia, but right across the world. I will ask, again, Commissioner Jim Higgins, as the Commissioner for Queensland Ambulance, to comment.

Commissioner Higgins: The Queensland Ambulance Service recently lodged an application with the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for assistance with mediation between some of our staff and the Queensland Ambulance Service in relation to roster reform. I am very pleased to report to the committee that the outcome of those discussions were that through collaboration we have worked with our staff and the union to resolve a number of outstanding issues related to the roster reform process.

I just want to reinforce that the two principal purposes of the roster reform process have been, first, to ensure that Queensland Ambulance resources are aligned to the demand profile of the community. The evidence of the introduction of roster reform is that response times have improved significantly across all areas where the roster reform process has been completed. We have improved access to meal breaks and reduced the incidence of shift overruns for all of those staff working the new rosters. The second aspect of roster reform was to ensure that we protected the long-term occupational health and wellbeing of our staff. The evidence is very clear about the introduction of 10-hour shifts supporting those arrangements and we will continue to roll those arrangements out as part of the government's commitment to the additional paramedics.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, all I can say is that you must be speaking to a different group of people from the ones that I have spoken to within the ambulance system.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes. You speak to the minority, I speak to the majority.

Mr ROWELL: You can speak to whoever you like.

Mr CUMMINS: You represent the minority. That is why you have an eight per cent approval rating.

CHAIR: Order!

Mr ROWELL: Do you mind if I ask the question?

CHAIR: Well, ask the question then.

Mr ROWELL: Thanks very much. I refer to page five of the MPS and the department's role in developing and supporting our people. Is it not correct that you, Minister, have ignored the impact of the roster reform on QAS staff and that you only introduced these reforms to improve your budget's bottom line?

Mr CUMMINS: The answer to that question is 'No.'

Mr ROWELL: Right. Minister, I refer to page five of the MPS and the department's role in developing and supporting people. Have you sought disciplinary action in any form, including any action in the Industrial Relations Commission, against people who have spoken out against your plan to use casual firefighters, and what form did the disciplinary action take? I would really like to get a clear understanding of whether you have gone down the same track with the firefighters and, particularly, those permanent firefighters who are extremely concerned with the implementation of using auxiliary firemen.

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. Specifically dealing with the issue of auxiliary firefighters and permanent firefighters, I can assure the committee and all Queenslanders that we have the utmost respect and confidence in our auxiliary firefighters. The government will, in my opinion, never criticise the great work that the auxiliary firefighters do. It is sad that those opposite wish to denigrate auxiliary firefighters and, in fact, infer they are not up to the job.

In the state electorate of Kawana that I represent on the Sunshine Coast, fire stations at both Kawana and Buderim are manned very ably by auxiliary firefighters. I think across Queensland we have about 2,000 auxiliary firefighters. Many of the permanent firefighters actually come through the auxiliary ranks. The auxiliary firefighters do a tremendous job. They work in numerous stations right across Queensland, side by side with the permanent firefighters. Many fire stations in Queensland have both permanent and auxiliary firefighters working out of the same complex day in, day out. Yet we hear this rhetoric—ill-founded rhetoric—that they cannot work on the same shifts.

As I said before, the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission is the independent umpire—something that the Labor side of politics is very proud to abide by. We are very proud to abide by the independent umpire. Our full-time firefighters also do a great job and the Beattie government is committed to ensuring the excellent service to our communities is continued to be maintained. Now, as far as the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission goes, we will abide by whatever outcome they come up with. It was recognised by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the United Firefighters Union—the UFU—that in the 1996 crewing agreement, alternative staffing strategies would apply in different centres and that any changes would necessitate flexibility by the parties. The Queensland Industrial Relations Commission, at a recent conference, provided the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service with the opportunity to trial the use of auxiliary firefighters for single shift replacement in seven centres for a six-month period. It is anticipated that this will enhance the crewing capacity of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service as sought by the union, the UFU, as well as providing savings that will be passed on in the form of enhancements to the service.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I did not hear any response, actually, as far as the disciplinary action was concerned. But what I would like to refer to now once again is on page five.

Mr CUMMINS: Can I just ask—disciplinary action to the QAS or to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service?

Mr ROWELL: The Fire and Rescue Service.

Mr CUMMINS: Okay. I will refer that to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Commissioner, if you wish.

Mr ROWELL: You gave a response which did not include it.

Mr CUMMINS: It is up to you. It is your time.

Mr ROWELL: Yes. I would certainly like to hear about it.

Mr CUMMINS: Okay. I would like the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Commissioner, Lee Johnson, to respond to that.

Mr ROWELL: I would like to add that the opposition very much respects the work and the role of the auxiliary fire people. Our view is quite contrary to what you are now saying.

CHAIR: Would you now let the commissioner answer the question?

Mr ROWELL: Yes, certainly.

Commissioner Johnson: There has been no disciplinary action taken against any member of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. This matter has been before the Industrial Relations Commission and, in fact, just recently I completed a tour with the deputy president of the commission to further examine this issue. But in direct response to your question, no action has been taken against any member of our staff.

Mr ROWELL: All right, good. Thanks. Once again, page five of the MPS—developing and supporting our people. What was the amount of overtime and meal allowance paid to firefighters in the last financial year?

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you very much for the question. I have touched upon what a great budget it is, not only for all the firefighters across Queensland but for all Queensland residents. We are seeing \$0.9 million—\$3.5 million over six years—for the upgrade of rural volunteer training, which will complement our Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, especially in this iZone area. We are also going to see \$0.2 million spent on community fire awareness. With regard to the specifics of the amount of money spent on overtime, meal allowances and so on, as you have asked, I would like to refer to Commissioner Lee Johnson from the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

Commissioner Johnson: As to the amount of funds expended during the 2004-05 financial year on overtime, the figures are being finalised at the moment but we expect the overtime figure to be slightly under \$10 million, probably in the vicinity of \$9.2 million or a little bit more. That is the current state of play. It is just under the \$10 million mark.

Mr ROWELL: There was another part to it, too. We were talking about the overtime and the meal allowances.

CHAIR: The member should direct his question through the minister.

Mr ROWELL: Sorry. May I ask that through you, Minister?

Mr CUMMINS: I am quite happy for the commissioner to answer that as soon as we get those figures.

Mr ROWELL: That was part of the original question.

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I understand.

Mr ROWELL: I do not think it should be treated as a separate question.

Mr CUMMINS: It is a 20-minute block. It does not matter if you ask 20 questions or one question.

Mr ROWELL: I understand. I have been here before.

Mr CUMMINS: So, you have 20 minutes. You have been through this process before?

Mr ROWELL: I certainly have. I am wondering if you have.

Mr CUMMINS: Good. If you want to take it on notice, we can do that.

Commissioner Johnson: I do not have before me the exact figures on meal allowances—that is rolled up.

Mr ROWELL: Can you take it on notice? That is great. Minister, I refer to page five again—developing and supporting our people. I refer to your plan to use casual firefighters in place of permanent staff. I ask you: What is the current amount of mandatory training undertaken by auxiliary firefighters, and what is the total budget for training auxiliary firefighters?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. It really is an opportune time for me to mention the \$20 million that we are going to pour into QCESA—the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy at Whyte Island. Many of the members have been down there and, in fact, yesterday, the federal Attorney-General, Phillip Ruddock was with me and we inspected the facility. This is a world-class training facility. It was formerly the fire academy. We want to make sure that all the various areas of the Department of Emergency Services are very well trained, that they work together, so we want to make sure that the auxiliary firefighters not only can work with the permanent firefighters but can also work in well with the State Emergency Service, the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Rescue where necessary.

As I said, the government has committed \$20 million over the next three years to further upgrade QCESA at Whyte Island, to allow for a world-class multiagency combined emergency services training academy. Our vision is one of an integrated multiservice education, training and research institute or centre of excellence for emergency services and emergency and disaster management. We launched that on 2 December last year. I would just like to mention that Gerard Lawlor, the Queensland Ambulance Service Assistant Commissioner, has been appointed interim director down at QCESA and he does a great job. With regard to the specifics of training, I do believe Lee Johnson, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service Commissioner, can answer in more detail as to the specific amounts of training that our auxiliary firefighters undertake.

Commissioner Johnson: Our auxiliary firefighters—or part-time firefighters—undertake a training package called ATEP—Auxiliary Training and Education Package—and there are two components of that, ATEP 1 and ATEP 2. They provide the fundamental training necessary for auxiliary firefighters to serve their community. It must be also remembered that auxiliary firefighters—or part-time firefighters, as we call them—serve in 162 out of 237 fire stations in Queensland. So the majority of fire service delivery in the urban environment is actually done by part-time firefighters, in terms of station numbers. That training package will also include additional courses in breathing apparatus, chemical hazards and road accident rescue and a range of other courses. We are at the stage of being, now, about to go through a renewal of that package in line with the national competency standards. That review is happening as we speak.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to the department's commitment to continual business improvement, as mentioned on page three of the MPS. I refer to the claims reported in the *Sunday Mail* in March this year regarding the alleged roting of sick leave within the Department of Emergency Services. What investigations were undertaken into these allegations, and what did those investigations conclude?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. From time to time, of a Sunday morning, I wake up and am very disappointed at some of the misrepresentations and allegations, many of them unfounded, that we read in the *Sunday Mail*. Specifically with regard to the allegations of absenteeism, leave liability and turnover on a monthly basis, my department measures its human resources performance against three key performance indicators—absenteeism, turnover and leave liability.

The annual absenteeism rate for days per person as at 31 March 2005 across the department was: Queensland Ambulance Service, 6.7 days; and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, 5.8 days; compared to the Public Service, 4.2 days. These absenteeism rates are similar to established benchmarks used across the Queensland public sector, with the last published measurement by the Department of Industrial Relations being 8.3 days per person per annum. It is projected that the total cost for absenteeism to the end of the financial year for the Queensland Ambulance Service will be \$4.376 million; for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, \$3.374 million approximately; and for the Public Service, \$764,000-plus approximately. I would like to refer the allegations that you have tabled with regard to the *Sunday Mail* to Commissioner Lee Johnson.

Commissioner Johnson: We certainly saw those allegations published and upon investigation were unable to substantiate any particular cases. Obviously we are very aware of potential for anything like that to happen and we do closely monitor that. But on that particular newspaper article nothing could be substantiated.

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

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, comments have been made by the opposition that community ambulance cover has done nothing for response times in Queensland. Will you please advise what the latest response times are and what growth we have seen in urgent responses due to the population growth in Queensland?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question and, yes, I do take great pleasure in highlighting that the Queensland Ambulance Service has continued to record strong performances right across this great state of Queensland. The community ambulance cover has provided the Queensland Ambulance Service with a solid and predictable funding base for the first time in its 112-year history, and from that the Queensland Ambulance Service has been able to employ more paramedics and deliver better services to the people of Queensland. As of June this year, the Queensland Ambulance Service has recorded its 12th consecutive improvement, and I mentioned that before—12 consecutive months of improvement—in response times to emergency code 1 incidents. This is a direct result of the community ambulance cover, and I think all Queenslanders would be greatly appreciative of the great work that the paramedics continue to do.

As of 30 June 2005, the paramedics are now on the scene in 68.57 per cent of all code 1 cases within 10 minutes. This year, 2005-06, to date that has gone up to 70.35 per cent. So we are still seeing improvements month after month after month. I am very pleased to say that in areas such as the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast where we have placed new paramedics, vehicles and have been implementing roster reform we have made significant gains. This is a magnificent outcome, particularly when you consider that Queensland has a growing and ageing population and paramedics have attended an additional 6,732 code 1 incidents in less than 10 minutes than in the previous financial year.

The community ambulance cover roster reform and a record boost to paramedic numbers statewide are obviously continuing to help the QAS provide this world-class ambulance service and meet the current and future demands right across Queensland. In every region across the state we can see our paramedics are better trained, better equipped and better prepared to meet the challenges of Queensland population increases—growth at twice the national rate. With additional paramedics, the Queensland Ambulance Service is now well on the way to implementing roster reform, which means that progressively the Queensland Ambulance Service is providing better and safer working conditions for the front-line staff.

It is important to note that, in addition to the community ambulance cover, our government has consistently provided record budgets for the Department of Emergency Services and the Queensland Ambulance Service, allowing it to deliver world-class patient care to all Queenslanders. A continued boost in paramedic numbers, new and redeveloped stations, new vehicles and equipment and greater training opportunities for rural paramedics are just some of the highlights of a record \$313.3 million state budget for the QAS in 2005-06. Every Queenslander can have confidence that when they call 000 in a medical emergency they will receive a prompt response from a modern Ambulance Service that is continuing to grow from strength to strength.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, I have heard claims that there has been a reduction in the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service budget. Will the minister inform the committee whether this is true?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question and acknowledge the great work that he does in Ipswich West. I have been out there numerous times and I know the strong support that you continue to provide right across the board of emergency services. Sadly, it is true that members of parliament have wrongly claimed that there has been a reduction in funding to the fire service. That claim is incorrect. I am particularly pleased that my department is allocating \$301.2 million towards enhancing our world-class QFRS, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. Comparisons between the 2005-06 and the 2004-05 output summary sources of revenue table in the MPS, the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, need to be undertaken with care and understanding of the change in the government's policy with respect to the equity return. A whole-of-government decision during 2004-05 to eliminate from 1 July 2004 the fully funded six per cent equity return expense has meant that \$18.3 million in operating expenses fully offset by output revenues has been removed from annual Queensland Fire and Rescue Service operating expenses.

The real increase in Queensland Fire and Rescue Service operating expenses between 2004-05 and 2005-06 is \$16 million. Thus the real increase in Queensland Fire and Rescue Service operating expenses is \$16 million. That is an increase of \$16 million, not a decrease. At the same time the capital expenditure budget for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has increased from \$38.5 million in 2004-05 to a record \$43.9 million this financial year, 2005-06.

Key budget initiatives for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service in 2005-06 include the second full year 2004-05 and 2005-06 enterprise partnership agreement including annual competency and service increments, which means more money for our firefighters; five additional iZone officers, which takes the number of iZone officers across the state to 10; additional positions for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service scientific services unit—formerly the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service, CDRS—and the Response Advice to Chemical Emergencies, which we refer to as the RACE unit; additional funding for integrated incident command for management training for volunteer and auxiliary firefighters; additional funding for uniform and turnout clothing upgrades; funding to continue the state integrated operational planning process and operations doctrine roll-out and development; additional operating expenses for the new Emergency Services computer aided dispatch system, the CAD; funding for greater enhanced aerial operations capability during the 2005 bushfire season—something I know is dear to many of our hearts—to greatly enhance the aerial operations of firefighting; funding to continue the department's successful community bushfire awareness program and media campaigns; and the list continues on and on.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: I thank the minister for his detailed response. In his budget reply speech, the member for Caloundra made some statements about Commonwealth funding and said—

I am certain the minister is overjoyed that the federal government is able to assist him financially in meeting the needs of Queenslanders.

Could the minister comment on that statement?

Mr CUMMINS: I would love to. I thank the member for the question. None of us can be overjoyed at the contribution by the federal government. You would come to expect this sort of loose with the truth rhetoric from the member for Caloundra and the total and deliberate misrepresentation of the figures. Comparisons between the 2005-06 and 2004-05 output summary sources of revenue table in the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, need to be undertaken with care and understanding of the change in the government's policy with respect to the equity return. The member for Caloundra has compared the MPS with the previous year's without paying attention to the footnotes. You have to read the footnotes if you are going to read and quote from the document. That just makes simple sense. These footnotes indicate the variances provided in the financial statements and the output income statements.

In the 2004-05 midyear review, the CBRC, the Cabinet Budget Review Committee, approved that the equity return charge be discontinued with effect from 2004-05. So, to enable year-to-year budgeted financial statement comparisons to be made in 2005-06, the MPS in the 2004-05 originally published budget has been recast to reflect the corresponding adjustments to the output revenue and equity return expense in the financial statements. So there is a reason for the big difference in the figures: there has been a major change in government policy. However, the output summary sources of revenue table does not have year-to-year comparatives and as such has caused misrepresentation of the actual increase. Accordingly, I would again like to clear up this misrepresentation or sometimes deliberate misleading of the level of funding from opposition members.

With respect to the Department of Emergency Services budget, the Commonwealth contribution has increased, but do not cheer yet. It should be noted that this represents an increase of \$1.808 million, less than \$2 million, whereas the 6.6 per cent increase in output revenue represents a \$21.59 million increase in funding by the state government to this department. The increase in output revenue to the Queensland Ambulance Service is 7.7 per cent and represents an \$18.043 million increase in funding to QAS—a real increase. Not one dollar has come from the Commonwealth, not one. I notice that the member did not mention the QAS in his speech.

The increase in the Commonwealth's contribution to the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service represents the deferral of the Natural Disaster Risk Management Studies Program from 2004-05 to 2005-06. That is a deferral of a program, not big buckets of additional cash.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, first of all, can I thank you and your department for keeping us informed in the electorate of Pumicestone. We certainly appreciate your regular visits to the electorate. Page 29 of the MPS refers to preparedness for bushfires. Could you please outline what measures are in train to ensure that Queenslanders are prepared for the forthcoming bushfire season?

Mr CUMMINS: Of course I will, and thank you very much for the question. About two-thirds of Queensland is currently at high risk of grass and bushfire. While some pockets of the state have received heavy rainfall in recent weeks, such as the chairman's area of the Gold Coast where we were at the weekend—we did have some localised flooding there, too—the big picture still shows cause for concern with regard to this high risk of grass and bushfire. The localised rainfall can cause greater bushfire risk further down the track because obviously the grasslands get fresh growth which then dries out and cures, causing possible bushfire risks. The levels in the Wivenhoe, Somerset and North Pine dams are still well below half capacity, I am advised, showing that the recent rainfall has only hit certain pockets.

The bushfire risk maps from the Rural Fire Service—I would like to hold one up so you can see it—show that many parts of Queensland are considered as having a high grass and bush fire risk. Although at this stage the far north and northern parts of the state are already into their fire season—it is not as severe as some of the previous years—it is still a timely reminder for all Queenslanders.

The good news is that all our fire services—the urban, the auxiliary and the rural—are very well drilled and well equipped. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is forging new territory with its Bushfire Prepared Communities initiative. As well as enhancing its operational readiness for bushfires, the service has developed one of the most sophisticated bushfire community education programs in the nation using \$250,000 of state government election commitment allocation. Urban sprawl, particularly in high-growth areas of the state such as the Gold and Sunshine coasts, the western corridor and north Brisbane and the changing climatic conditions are increasing the likelihood of wildfire threats to communities that are close to and amongst highly flammable rural environments. This is sometimes known as the interface zone, or the iZone, where the bricks and tiles meet the bush.

The Bushfire Prepared Communities initiative provides advice and assistance enabling householders to better protect themselves and their property and to be ready to respond to a wildfire incident in a planned manner. This forms part of a wider QFRS project that is looking at planning and development issues in the iZone and operational improvements to ensure that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is better prepared to respond to major wildfire incidents. Consultation and collaboration with stakeholders is the key to the success of this program. Government agencies such as the Queensland Police Service, the Environmental Protection Agency and the Department of Local Government, Planning, Sport and Recreation are also contributors to the program. The strategy is aimed at helping householders understand bushfire identity and the risks that it may create for them and at providing them with on-the-spot advice and information.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I note on page 4 of the MPS that the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service are working together towards the joint acquisition and implementation of the Emergency Services computer aided dispatch systems, or CAD, as part of a statewide implementation of the Strategic Information Management Initiative, or SIMI, to improve patient care records and reduce administrative workloads. Could you please outline to this committee the benefits to both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service of this initiative?

Mr CUMMINS: I certainly can, and I will do it with props. Props are always good to explain such a technical thing. I thank the member for the question. The Strategic Information Management Initiative, known as SIMI—we love our acronyms in the department, and so we should—and referred to in the MPS as the automated data system is one of the great news stories of the government's 2005-06 budget. This system will allow paramedics to work smarter through the use of innovative technology. This year alone \$7 million has been allocated for the continued implementation of SIMI to help reduce paperwork by paramedics and further improve response times.

My department has also made a \$2.7 million commitment for continued enhancements to the operational communication system and the upgrading of operational equipment right across the state. Today I would like to encourage members to put an 'in case of emergency' number into their phone. This is very important for those of us who use mobile phones. You tap in the ICE—the 'in case of emergency' number. This campaign to encourage people to store personal details on their mobile phones helps identify victims of accidents and disasters. This has come through in the London bombings. When a paramedic or someone gets to you they can look up 'ICE'—in case of emergency—and it might have 'wife', it might have 'brother' or it might have 'father'. It will have that number, and it can be redialled just in case you cannot. Then they can get some information through immediately. I am urging all mobile phone users to store something in their memory under 'ICE'. We are going to roll it out through the Department of Emergency Services.

Getting back to SIMI, the community and paramedics will benefit from the use of portable devices to collect patient care case information. This is instead of the manual, paper based process in operation at present. I will ask the commissioner to display it. What you are looking at is what they used to have to fill out. That compares with basically a laptop computer. That is a great Smart State initiative.

The Queensland Ambulance Service will start piloting the system later this year in ambulance stations in the south-eastern region—in fact, the Ipswich area. Following a successful pilot—and we have no doubt that it will be successful—the system will be progressively deployed throughout the state during 2006. It is planned to deploy some 500 of those portable tablet devices for patient case information collection.

During 2006 the system will be interfaced to the new generation computer aided dispatch system, which you mentioned, and is currently being commissioned by the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to further information sharing and exchange between these systems during prehospital care services.

The other initiative that will be undertaken in parallel to the automated data system is the implementation of contemporary technologies providing work force planning, scheduling and operations coordination capabilities. The outcome from this initiative will include improved response capabilities, improved meal breaks and fatigue break management, and the offering of a better balance to a paramedic's life between work and family. The new CAD system is great news not just for paramedics and fires but for all Queenslanders. It will strengthen and improve our dispatching system and provide

more efficient control of the fleet through the Department of Emergency Services, which will then help improve response times, ensuring the most appropriate responses to all emergencies.

CHAIR: The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I now call upon the member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON: Thank you, Mr Chairman. Minister, I refer you to page 3 of your portfolio statement which refers to your department's continued pursuit of efficiencies, and I ask: are you aware that volunteer rural fire group officers are able to apply for a grant of \$1,000 to assist offsetting administration costs incurred by these officers and yet some volunteers have to spend up to \$400 for auditing fees of the grant money to satisfy your department's auditing requirements? What are you prepared to do about this ridiculous situation?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. Let me assure you that the rural firefighters are extremely well respected by both sides of government. They do a marvellous job. We have something like 45,000 rural fire volunteers right across Queensland. As I said earlier, I have 85,000 volunteers within my department, and we would not be able to operate the Department of Emergency Services without the great support of our rural fire volunteers and all our volunteers.

We have continued to pour more money than ever before into the rural fire area. As a reflection of the Department of Emergency Services' dedication to the approximately 45,000 rural fire brigade volunteers, initiatives are being put in place across Queensland to enhance our world-class Rural Fire Service. In this year's budget we have \$3.8 million for 55 rural vehicles and 20 fire-fighting trailers. We are going to roll out \$3.5 million over six years for the upgrade of rural volunteer training materials and the acceleration of rural fire brigade training, and we are going to spend about \$150,000 on the construction of more rural fire brigade sheds.

The Rural Fire Service, within the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, provides a range of services and financial subsidies to the rural fire brigades including grants for specific projects, fire appliances and equipment at subsidised prices, and training and administrative support. I meet regularly, as you would well know, with the Rural Fire Brigades Association of Queensland and the Rural Fire Advisory Council, whose members have input into the design of the fire response appliances manufactured for the RFS. For fire-fighting appliances, brigades receive 80 per cent of the full cost of the vehicle. For equipment listed in the RFS equipment catalogue, brigades receive 50 per cent of the wholesale or the contract price. Personal protective equipment is provided free of charge. VHF radio equipment is provided at a 75 per cent subsidy and UHF equipment is provided at a 50 per cent subsidy. As of 1 July 2003 boots have been provided free of charge. I would ask Commissioner Lee Johnson to comment more specifically on that.

Commissioner Johnson: It also must be understood that the administration of rural fire brigades has been, for time immemorial, a responsibility of the brigades. The particular money that you are talking about actually goes to the group administration area, and they are able to offset some of those costs through funds raised locally. The main feature of Fire and Rescue is to provide equipment—subsidised—provide training and provide subsidised appliances. Administration of the brigade on a day-to-day basis is very much dependent on the local rural fire levy that is struck with the local authority. How the brigades and the groups actually administer and cover costs is an issue basically at both brigade and group level.

Mr WELLINGTON: Mr Chairman, if I can go back to the question again, I am informed that volunteer rural fire group officers are able to apply, from the service, for a grant of \$1,000 to assist offsetting administration costs and that the fire service requires that they have those audited. The fee that one volunteer has had to incur is \$400. The fire officer in question has raised this matter with other fire officers in the Caboolture area and they share his sentiments and concerns. So again I repeat the question: why can we not simplify the efficiency process that you are requiring of the volunteers?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. I reiterate: we have record budgets. When we came into power in 1998 we introduced a program whereby we would ensure that rural fire brigades do not have vehicles older than 20 years. We are putting in more money than ever before, and guess what? I think all Queenslanders want to make sure that that money is accounted for. If the member is going to imply that we should hand out money and not have it accounted for, he can stand up on his soapbox and say that. All we are asking for is a normal accounting mechanism. The Beattie government is handing out more money than ever before. We want to make sure that it is properly accounted for. That is what it comes back to.

I would look at it the other way. I would expect that people on your side of the table today would be asking questions about accountability and not, sadly, about how much some people are charged to make sure that accountability is up to scratch. If we are going to hand out millions of dollars right across Queensland, any Queenslanders would expect there to be some accountability, and that is what it comes back to.

Mr WELLINGTON: Mr Chairman, if I can just pursue the issue about accountability in the portfolio statement that we are discussing at the moment—

CHAIR: Member for Nicklin, the committee will now adjourn for an hour. The hearing will resume at 1.50 pm to continue the examination of the portfolio of Emergency Services.

Mr WELLINGTON: It should be accountable, but not for \$400. Out of \$1,000 they spend \$400 on an accountant. Minister, that is not appropriate. With respect, Queenslanders do not expect to have to pay \$400—

CHAIR: We are adjourned.

Proceedings suspended from 12.48 pm to 1.51 pm

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee G hearing is now resumed. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Emergency Services be agreed to.

I call again on the member for Nicklin.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, I refer you to your answer to my question on notice No. 19 which relates to the need to find a new location for the Nambour Fire Station. In your answer you said that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service is continuing to source appropriate land and will continue to brief me on the issue. Have you allocated sufficient money in this year's budget to purchase land for the new Nambour Fire Station and sufficient money to build the new station at that site?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. I will answer that in one second. I gave you a commitment prior to the lunchbreak about the issue you had raised. In relation to those comments, where rural fire brigades have joined together to form a group, usually on shire boundaries, the Rural Fire Service recognises the administrative costs that are involved in the operation of the group and provides \$1,000 to the group each financial year to offset administrative costs. Where our brigades are in receipt of public money, obviously there is a requirement to be accountable for those moneys. That requirement is communicated to brigades through the *Rural Fire Brigade Manual*. The Rural Fire Service does not determine the processes that are utilised by brigades to undertake that requirement. If they are paying \$400 in auditing fees, I am sure there should be a more cost-effective alternative. We take a flexible approach to auditing that is in balance with the level of public funds and do not place undue demands on brigades to complete the audit process. In all instances, an cost of audit would be considered to be the cost of a brigade operation that would be borne by the brigade and not expected to be borne by an individual.

Where brigades are in receipt of a local government levy, the processes for audit are most often conducted by the local authority as part of its accountability. I think the member would remember that only too well from his days in the council. That accountability, due to the Local Government Act, is for the collection and distribution of rural fire brigade funds. A lot of the audit requirements are donated by local government and community members, such as local accountants or other members of the public who have that expertise.

If the member is happy to write to me with regard to a specific example, I will give him a commitment that we will look into it further. I point out that the member is well aware of the brigades in his area which have been the beneficiaries of new equipment and vehicles in recent years. I do not need to go through them and list them all—even the ones that I have handed out.

With regard to the Nambour Fire Station, I have been on site with the member on occasions to inspect it. I am aware that we funded a new exhaust type mechanism to get the fumes away. You are aware that a number of sites have been investigated for their potential or suitability to accommodate a new fire station complex. It was not a commitment in this term of the government cycle to build a new station at Nambour.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, page 4 of your Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to additional staff who will enhance the operation and service delivery of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service. How many of these additional staff will be assigned to the Nambour Ambulance Station and the Nambour Fire Station?

Mr CUMMINS: That is a very good question. As per usual, you are fighting hard for your area. I mean that in a very positive way. As you are well aware—and I have said it numerous times—we are continuing to roll out 350 extra paramedics over a four-year period. You did say the QAS and QFRS, didn't you? Both?

Mr WELLINGTON: Yes.

Mr CUMMINS: With regard to the Queensland Ambulance Service, the model of service delivery will not be decided at a political level. I will not be allocating the people where I think they should be; that will be done by Commissioner Jim Higgins. The same applies for the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. That will be done by Commissioner Lee Johnson.

Firstly, in relation to the question about the Queensland Ambulance Service paramedics allocation to Nambour, I would like to refer that to Commissioner Jim and regarding increases of fire staff to the Sunshine Coast area, I refer that to Commissioner Lee.

Commissioner Higgins: As part of the roll-out of the 350 additional paramedics for the Queensland Ambulance Service, the implementation of roster reform has occurred at Nambour and the precise staffing levels at Nambour are in place for 10-hour shifts for all of the Nambour station. The completion of the Sunshine Coast in its entirety will occur over the roll-out of the remainder of the two years of the election commitment for a further 140 paramedics. Of course, on the Sunshine Coast, the Ambulance Service operates through a dynamic deployment model where ambulance resources are mobile and can respond to any area. In essence, the whole of the Sunshine Coast will operate on a 10-hour shift model with the neighbouring stations supporting each other. The resourcing for Nambour has occurred. Further resources will be rolled out in the Sunshine Coast over the next two years.

Mr CUMMINS: I think the commissioner said 150 paramedics across Queensland.

Commissioner Higgins: Three hundred and fifty and 140 remaining.

Mr CUMMINS: I just hope you were not implying that they were all going to Sunshine Coast.

Commissioner Higgins: No.

Commissioner Johnson: In terms of the Nambour Fire Station, there will be no further allocation of staff to the Nambour Fire Station. Currently, it has a complement of 19 full-time permanent firefighters and 10 part-time auxiliary firefighters. That is the standard establishment for 24-hour staffed stations. In terms of the Sunshine Coast more broadly, 10 additional firefighters will be stationed at the Maroochydore Fire Station. They are starting to be put in place now to crew a brand-new \$1.4 million aerial firefighting appliance, a new Bronto appliance, which is currently under construction. However, in terms of the Nambour Fire Station directly, there will be no new staff at that station.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I refer you to page 5 of the MPS which deals with developing and supporting our people. What amount of overtime meal allowances were paid to ambulance personnel in the last financial year?

Mr CUMMINS: I can assure the member that with the roster reform and with the roll-out of the extra paramedics right across Queensland, which we just spoke about—350 extra paramedics across a four-year period—we are seeing and we will continue to see more paramedics not only rolled out and working better rosters but also receiving their meal breaks. You are right; meal breaks and when staff need to be paid for missing those meal breaks, is a concern.

In a 12-month period, unaudited, for the Queensland Ambulance Service I believe overtime is \$22.3 million and the meal allowance is under \$3 million. I think the broken meal allowance is approximately \$1.1 million. If any of those figures are incorrect, I will immediately get back to you, but that is the information we have at this stage.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I refer you to page 35 of the MPS which deals with the timeliness of mobilising QFRS crews within the urban levy boundaries. I particularly refer to the work undertaken by our dedicated auxiliary crews. Why does Proserpine have only an auxiliary service despite servicing a population of up to 10,000 people in the town and immediate areas? Also, will you concede that you are placing an unfair workload on these auxiliaries

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. The area of Proserpine is one that I have visited on two, possibly three, occasions. I know that I have been at the fire station on two occasions and recently handed over a new fire appliance. I spoke to the local Chamber of Commerce executive—I am not sure whether it was the president or the secretary—who has corresponded with me, as has the local member for Whitsunday, Jan Jarratt.

We have looked at the delivery service model for Proserpine. As you realise, more than \$300 million has been allocated to the QFRS to enhance training and provide new and refurbished stations and new vehicles as part of the 2005-06 state budget that we are discussing. This budget will continue to enable the QFRS to deliver world-class fire and rescue services.

In the 2004-05 financial year to 1 May, 95 per cent of all structural fire incidents within the urban levy boundaries were responded to within 14 minutes. That is well above target. I take on board your comments about our extremely well-respected and hardworking auxiliaries. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service continues to achieve its targets, despite the continuing trend of the number of incidents increasing.

In regard to Proserpine and auxiliaries right across the state, I am extremely appreciative of the approximately 2,000 auxiliaries that we have. Many of those auxiliaries, if not every one of them, would have a permanent job and they are working for part of the community. They may have a pager on which they receive a call, as they do at Buderim within my electorate of Kawana, and they have to get to their fire station and turnout. Whether it be a volunteer in a rural fire brigade, an SES volunteer or an auxiliary firefighter, the Labor government is extremely appreciative of the sacrifice that employers make by ensuring that their employees can make this sacrifice for the good of the community.

With regard to the station being an auxiliary class station at the moment, I will ask Commissioner Lee Johnson to comment further.

Commissioner Johnson: Mr Rowell, I will make a quick response to your earlier question about the overtime meal allowance. That was raised in the overtime question. For the QFRS, \$70,000 was paid as part of overtime meal allowances. Our overtime figure, the unaudited result, at the end of July is \$9.36 million.

I am not aware of Proserpine having a population of 10,000. However, Proserpine, in comparison to centres such as Emerald, Moranbah and Dalby, falls very much within the crewing and staffing model that QFRS uses right across the whole of Queensland. We continually monitor the growth of communities and at this point in time we do not believe that Proserpine warrants a full-time staffing model.

Mr ROWELL: Thank you, Minister. In the case of Proserpine, I talked about the immediate area; I did not talk specifically about the town.

Mr CUMMINS: He is the commissioner; I am the minister.

Mr ROWELL: But I am raising just it with you, Minister, because I cannot refer to the commissioner. It is your duty to call on him.

Mr CUMMINS: That is all right.

Mr ROWELL: Okay. Proserpine not only is a large rural town but also is adjacent to a rapidly increasing volume of traffic on the Bruce Highway where accidents can frequently occur. It has a busy airport which services light aircraft and five commercial flights in and out on a daily basis. Why is the Proserpine Fire Station not manned by at least a range of permanent and auxiliary staff? Is this a simple cost cutting measure by you which disregards the imminent danger to life?

Mr CUMMINS: No.

Mr ROWELL: It is not? So you are quite happy with the situation in Proserpine?

Mr CUMMINS: I think it was just explained by the commissioner that the model of service delivery for that region is one that he, as probably the best fire commissioner in Australia, is extremely pleased with. When you talk about the airline services into the area and other factors, we do understand that the Proserpine auxiliaries do go to a lot of road accident rescues because of the Bruce Highway and the incidents along there. I have thanked not only here but also in Proserpine the employers of those people. As I say, we believe that the delivery of service in that area is suitable. In fact, there are other areas that would probably be busier. If we were going to change from auxiliary to permanent fire stations there may be others higher up on the list

Mr ROWELL: Minister, on page 7 of the MPS the departmental financial summary shows an operational surplus of \$14.094 million estimated actual for 2004-05, which was over \$4 million the adjusted budget of \$10.011 million for 2004-05. The 2005-06 estimate shows another surplus of \$6.868 million. If that surplus increases at a similar ratio to last year's surplus, the figure might be \$10 million. It is always necessary to have a cost-effective, efficient service, but why are we not providing adequate funding for the staffing requirements that the ambulance and the fire services need?

Mr CUMMINS: We are providing adequate funds for both the Queensland Ambulance Service and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service. That is the answer to that question.

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

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I understand the superb qualities of our paramedics and I understand that paramedics from the Queensland Ambulance Service were deployed to Banda Aceh in response to the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami disaster. I understand that that was the first time that QAS staff have been officially deployed on an overseas humanitarian mission. Can you please outline for the committee the outcomes of that deployment?

Mr CUMMINS: I am very pleased to respond to this question because I know that all members on both sides of the House applaud the great work that the Queensland Ambulance Service did in response to the Boxing Day tsunami in sending people to Banda Aceh. As we know, members of my department volunteered to assist our neighbours in Indonesia in the wake of this terrible tsunami on 26 December last year. It was referred to as Team Foxtrot, joining Queensland Health officers to spend 16 days in the disaster-affected areas of Banda Aceh. These five operational staff—and I will name them—are great Queenslanders who have the immense respect of not only myself but also the entire department. Geoff Dunning, Gavin Leader, Matthew Green, Brad Bird and firefighter Chris Dowdle unselfishly put their hands up to work in partnership with medical staff from Queensland Health to assist and treat the sick and injured of Banda Aceh. With more than 280,000 lives lost and countless more suffering injuries and disease caused by the Boxing Day destruction, my department, which has a duty of care to the people of Queensland, showed that we also have a duty of care to our international neighbours in their time of need.

The paramedics assisted in operating theatres. A large amount of their time spent in Banda Aceh was also spent assisting hospital patients with the treatment of wounds and infection control as well as providing their usual world-class prehospital care. The firefighter in the team, Chris Dowdle—truly a

great Queenslander—helped with the logistics for Team Foxtrot and was also a vital link in the computer and communications systems used to send information back to Queensland.

Leading the Emergency Services contingent into Banda Aceh was paramedic Geoff Dunning. Geoff has spent 19 years in the Queensland Ambulance Service and 23 years, I believe, in the Australian Army as a medic. Geoff has vast experience in planning and clinical care for major incidents such as the Gold Coast Indy and schoolies.

Our Emergency Services team was under no illusion that the task ahead of them would be a simple one. It took personal courage, dedication and mental health; all of which members of the team have in great abundance. This team gained valuable information and put us in a good position to respond if a similar disaster should ever occur close to home, God forbid. The Queensland team in Banda Aceh was so well provisioned and so self-sufficient during their deployment that they did not burden the already limited local food and water supplies or infrastructure. In fact, other states in Australia looked to Queensland to see how it should be done.

As you would be aware, our Emergency Services personnel play a vital role in the community and it is essential that they have the best equipment, best training and best facilities as possible. The record funding provided in this budget will allow the Department of Emergency Services to continue its focus on reducing the level of risk and impact of emergencies and disasters on our communities so that we can respond to natural disaster or terrorism when required.

Team Foxtrot was one of the most carefully planned and executed international deployments into the devastated region. We as Queenslanders and those in the department should all be very proud of Team Foxtrot members for the great work that they did in Banda Aceh. They will have powerful memories of their time there, despite the relatively short period they spent there, and many have made strong friendships. I again say that all Queenslanders should be very proud of this team as they are immense Queenslanders and great people.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I note at page 23 of the MPS that there is reference to an enhanced helicopter capacity and capability to service the Torres Strait and northern peninsula area. Can you outline for the committee the details of that and also expand on other initiatives for the Cape York and Torres Strait areas?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I would love to because the Beattie government is committed to enhancing community safety for all Queenslanders. As well as the announcement I have made today about the Queensland rescue helicopter fleet, the Queensland government will invest more than \$2 million extra each year to fund a twin-engine emergency helicopter for Torres Strait and the tip of Cape York. A twin-engine craft will replace the single-engine helicopter that now services the Torres Strait and ensure better health care and safety for the people of that remote region.

The investment will begin with an extra \$2.2 million in the budget for the 2006-07 financial year and rise in following years to an extra \$2.8 million indexed annually. It will lift total recurrent funding for the helicopter to \$3.2 million in 2006-07 and \$3.8 million in future years.

The decision to introduce a twin-engine helicopter for this area was determined by three factors: safety, efficiency and timeliness. I was in the Torres Strait about a fortnight ago and I know that the new helicopter will improve safety for patients and clinical crew in night operations and over water. It will also deliver a safe and more efficient medical response to isolated communities and improve response times. The Department of Emergency Services will soon call for tenders for a twin-engine IFR—instrument flight rules—helicopter to begin service in December 2006 after the current contract expires.

The new-twin engine rescue helicopter will mean an improved lift capacity plus improved aeromedical and air rescue operations capability. It will also give improved access for the clinical crew to patients and equipment during flight plus the ability to carry a ventilator and a humidicrib for neonatal patients.

In further good news for the region, the Department of Emergency Services Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package is also enhancing and improving services. It will provide for Indigenous ambulance attendants at Doomadgee and Mornington Island; the establishment of a field officer position at Cooktown; the establishment of a first responder program at St Pauls community—where I visited recently and saw them in their new uniforms, and I can tell you they are a very, very proud community—on Moa Island and Pormpuraaw in Cape York; and maintenance of recruitment targets for Indigenous people as student ambulance officers.

New first responder groups are also earmarked for Badu Island and Yam Island. The Indigenous Australian Service Delivery Enhancement Package has already provided first aid training and CPR courses to rural and remote communities and out-stations and it has provided culturally appropriate senior first-aid training for Indigenous communities and it has provided first-aid kits.

In recent achievements the department has provided a joint emergency services facility at Mornington Island, which I was very happy to open; five officers in the Cape York area to support Emergency Services workers; and has also installed new UHF two-way repeaters and base units in targeted sites as part of the Cape York and Torres Strait UHF radio network.

In the fire service there has been equipment provided for Coen; the development of a remote community volunteer training enhancement package for Mornington Island and Doomadgee, plus culturally relevant fire safety kits for communities as well. In closing, Wujul Wujul will also get a new shed for the Rural Fire Service and SES, which will complement the new flood boat that I was able to hand over in Wujul Wujul less than three weeks ago.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, building a Smart Queensland is important for all Queenslanders. What capital works are allocated from this budget for the department?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. Again, I would like to say what a great job not only our volunteers but also obviously our staff do in the Department of Emergency Services. The initiatives provided for in this budget will ensure that our operational staff and dedicated network of volunteers will have the resources that they need to provide these world-class services to all Queenslanders on a daily basis.

As members of the committee would no doubt agree, Queensland paramedics and firefighters do a wonderful job in protecting the lives of Queenslanders every day. It is vital that the government provides them with the best possible resources to do so. In 2005-06 the highlight of this record budget is the enhancement of the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy—the QCESA. An amount of \$20 million over three years will fund the enhancement of this national and international centre of excellence for emergency management training and community staff. This innovative and entrepreneurial initiative is crucial in ensuring an integrated, multiservice education training and research institute and centre of excellence for emergency and disaster management. Each education section will retain their identity, structure and, most importantly, their culture, but they will work more closely under the academy ethos of integration, collaboration and cooperation.

This \$20 million investment will also deliver a simulation environment to support scenario based training in hazardous materials and provide the foundations for a moderate scenario village streetscape that will support the BA, the breathing apparatus, and hazmat, hazardous material, training and enable cooperative training between the QFRS, QAS and CDRS.

Another example of building our Smart State is the redevelopment of the Roma Street Fire and Ambulance Station. The Department of Emergency Services responds to more than 14,000 incidents annually from the Roma Street Fire and Ambulance Station. That is approximately 8,000 QAS and about 6,000 Queensland Fire and Rescue Service incidents. After a thorough investigation of alternatives and consultation with the City West Task Force, the Major Sports Facilities Authority and the Department of Public Works, my department has decided to redevelop on the existing site to ensure the optimum response and service delivery to the CBD and inner-western suburbs. Planning for the redevelopment of the site to create an integrated Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Ambulance Service is nearing completion.

The works include the temporary relocation of the existing stations to South Brisbane while demolition and construction are undertaken. Firefighters are moving this Saturday and paramedics are moving on Monday. The construction will commence in the early part of 2005-06. The current estimate of the cost is \$17.6 million. In 2004-05 the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service spent more than \$17 million on capital works, land purchases and building minor works.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: I refer you to page 39 of the MPS, which states that firefighters have once again exceeded the target for response times to fires. Can you please advise how the QFRS has been able to maintain this performance?

Mr CUMMINS: This year's record budget of \$667.5 million for the emergency services department enables the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to continue to deliver world-class fire and rescue services to all Queenslanders while providing enhanced training, new refurbished stations and new vehicles. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service responds to a variety of incidents including fires, road accidents and other rescues, hazardous substance emergencies such as chemical spills, floods, earthquakes, storms, landslides and, sadly, bomb blasts.

The QFRS will continue to improve the operational preparedness of firefighters across Queensland through world-class training and innovation. On average, Queensland fire crews are on the scene at a structural fire in an urban levy area in approximately nine minutes. In 2004-05, to 1 May 2005, 95 per cent of all structural fire incidents within urban levy boundaries were responded to within 14 minutes. This is well above target and a credit to our hardworking fires and the commissioner.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service continues to achieve its targets despite the continuing trend of the number of incidents increasing. In 2004-05 the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service responded to almost 60,000 incidents. In 1999-2000 there were only 51,526 incidents. That is an increase of almost 17 per cent from 1999-2000. I think we all understand what this means.

Response times can be influenced by a number of factors, including incident numbers and the activities fire crews are conducting at the time of the call. In addition, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will continue to improve the operational preparedness of firefighters across Queensland through world-class training and innovation. This allows the QFRS to maintain excellent service to the community, including world-class emergency response.

Another part of response times is the mobilisation time. That is a measure of the time taken from the receipt of the alarm call until the first attending appliance notifies FireCom, Fire Communications, that it is en route to the incident. Mobilisation times are only a small part of response times. On average, QFRS urban crews mobilise for response to the scene of a structural fire in an urban levy area in around four minutes. Regardless of mobilisation times and targets QFRS has consistently met response targets for all stations.

The QFRS, while already exceeding response time targets, continues to develop its service delivery to the community in response to emergencies. Up to 31 March 2005 the QFRS managed to reduce the property loss figure—and this is a very important figure—to \$3.1 million per 100,000 people. That is significantly lower than the anticipated figure for 2004-05 of \$4 million to \$5.6 million. These figures reflect the effectiveness and the initiatives of the QFRS towards home safety and property protection. The properties saved figure per 100,000 people for the same period is \$323.7 million.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Page 32 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement refers to the Rural Appliance Modernisation Program and outlines the number of different types of fire trucks and trailers delivered to the rural fire brigade. Can the minister expand on this initiative and explain to the committee how it improves the firefighting capacity of our rural fire volunteers?

Mr CUMMINS: I am very pleased to respond to this question. I know all members of parliament are really appreciative of the great work of rural firefighters. We know that we are rolling out more of the yellow fire appliances to the Rural Fire Service right across Queensland. In 2005-06 the Department of Emergency Services will ensure that a number of initiatives, as part of this record \$667.5 million budget, will be put in place across Queensland to further enhance our world-class Rural Fire Service.

These initiatives will include \$3.8 million for the construction of 55 rural vehicles and 25 firefighting trailers. As in the previous year, and subject to changes in the number or combination of appliances, this vehicle build program will comprise five heavy cab chassis vehicles, 30 medium response vehicles and 20 light response vehicles.

Over recent months dozens of rural fire brigades have received new firefighting appliances. Last weekend I was pleased to hand over with the Premier vehicles at the Gold Coast where the chairman hosted community cabinet in the electorate of Gaven. We have done this across the state. We have handed them over in Maleny, Ross Creek, Condamine, Moranbah, Tiaro, Toogoolawah, Mareeba, Stone Henge and Sarina, just to name a few. Over the past 12 months we have done this along with station openings and medal presentations. It is important recognition of our very hardworking volunteers.

The continuing success of the Rural Fire Service's vehicle building program, also known as the veteran vehicle replacement program, can be attributed to the Beattie government's funding initiative that provided \$19.25 million over seven years. By December 2005 there should be no rural fire brigade vehicle older than 20 years of age remaining in the fleet, except in cases where a vehicle has a current roadworthy certificate. This is really a great achievement.

The most recent figures indicate that as at 30 May 2005 there were 879 units in the Rural Fire Service fleet, with the average age of the fleet being nine years. Of these appliances 40 were in the 15 to 19 year age range and 56, or 6.5 per cent, of the fleet were 20 years or over. If we go back to 1998-99 we find that 40 per cent of the fleet was over 20 years of age. That is a great reduction. An initiative was taken by the Beattie government to reduce the age of appliances to no greater than 20 years by December 2005.

The new Rural Fire Service vehicles are made available at a subsidised price. The state government pays 80 per cent of the construction costs and the brigades only 20 per cent. A regionally based Queensland company, AAA Engineering Technologies of Crows Nest, constructs rural fire brigade appliances and trailers. I was there recently with Kerry Shine. They do an excellent job. They are exporting to New Zealand.

These fire appliances were developed with a direct input from volunteers, the end users of the appliances. They are, after all, using the vehicles at rural fires and have tremendous practical experience. I have been involved in handovers of rural fire vehicles in all corners of the state and I have heard first-hand from volunteers many times about the benefits of the new and improved vehicles. This rural appliance modernisation program is ensuring that the rural fire volunteers around the state are receiving purpose-built fire vehicles that will make their jobs just that little bit easier.

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

Mr ROWELL: I refer to page 4 of the MPS and the department's role in enhancing operational service delivery. I refer to the multiple failures of defibrillator equipment in January this year. I note that the manufacturer assessed that the failure of the cables occurred as a result of wear and tear. If the claim that equipment was regularly maintained and checked is correct, then why was the wear and tear not detected earlier? Some people have not survived. Patients have been pronounced deceased at the scene as a result of this equipment failure.

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. The state equipment and vehicle committee performs a variety of functions that include critically examining equipment to ensure, as far as possible, the highest quality standards are met. Even with these strict controls equipment failures can occur from time to time. On 29 January 2005 two separate incidents occurred where patients who suffered cardiac arrests were unable to be defibrillated by the attending ambulance crews. The cause in both these cases has been confirmed by Laerdal, the manufacturer of the Heartstart 4000 defibrillator, as the failure of the connector adaptor cables supplied with the defibrillators.

When the Heartstart 4000 defibrillator was introduced to the service in 1999 Laerdal provided a connector adaptor cable with each new Heartstart 4000. At this time the Queensland Ambulance Service was also using the Heartstart 3000 defibrillator. This connector provided the Queensland Ambulance Service with a manufacturer approved option to use the five centimetre defibrillator pad for both the Heartstart 4000 and Heartstart 3000 machines.

The QAS continued to utilise the Heartstart 3000 defibrillator pads with the assistance of a lead extension with no apparent problem until 29 January 2005. On becoming aware of the failures, the Queensland Ambulance Service immediately notified all ambulance stations, informed me of a potential problem, and requested that alternative defibrillator types be used. Where this was not possible, ambulance stations were requested to inspect and test Heartstart 4000 defibrillators and connector adaptor cables in accordance with the information supplied by the manufacturers.

The action by the Queensland Ambulance Service enabled the issue to be quickly and effectively managed with no further adverse impact on patients. On Sunday, 30 January 2005 representatives from QAS met with representatives of Laerdal and an independent senior biomedical engineer consultant to investigate the failures and to implement arrangements to ensure that they were not repeated.

At that meeting it was agreed that Laerdal would immediately notify the Therapeutic Goods Administration and advise other customers, including other ambulance services, that a problem had been identified. Laerdal notified the Therapeutic Goods Administration on Monday, 31 January 2005 and the company was advised to submit a medical device incident report to the Therapeutic Goods Administration within 10 days. The report was submitted to the Therapeutic Goods Administration on 7 February 2005.

While under no legal obligation, the QAS submitted a separate report to the Therapeutic Goods Administration on 16 February 2005 to ensure that the Queensland Ambulance Service was included in the Therapeutic Goods Administration process. By 1 February 2005 the QAS had secured all available stocks of Heartstart 4000 pads to ensure that all Heartstart 4000 defibrillators were operating with Heartstart 4000 pads.

On 18 February 2005 Laerdal provided the Queensland Ambulance Service with a report confirming that the fault lay with the adaptor cables. Concurrent to this report Laerdal issued a safety alert in relation to the adaptor cables. Subsequently, Laerdal, in conjunction with the Therapeutic Goods Administration, issued a recall for product correction notice. This notice required that all patient adaptor cables be either destroyed or labelled not for clinical use but for training purposes only.

I am completely satisfied with the Queensland Ambulance Service's timely and proactive management of these unfortunate incidents. I have been advised that on the day the failures occurred to the Queensland Ambulance Service items both had been checked by paramedics that morning.

Mr ROWELL: I hear what you say. I refer to page 5 of the MPS and the training of paramedics into the expanded role to assist doctors and nurses. I refer to the proposal recently reported in the *Courier-Mail* which involves the training of paramedics as part-time doctors for remote areas. Minister, many of these remote areas experiencing doctor shortages, such as Barcaldine, are single officer ambulance stations. How do you expect these officers to prioritise their responsibilities as both a doctor and an emergency service responder? Are you not making a demand that could be beyond their capacity to address?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the very good question. We have all seen across Queensland the urgent need for more doctors. While we realise it comes back to the federal government providing more training places, we as a government—and the Premier has outlined this—want to put all the cards on the table. We want to see whether we can have nurses trained to a higher standard and paramedics trained to a higher standard, as they have been overseas.

I think that the point of your question is a little hypothetical, but I am more than happy to continue. I think the crux of your question is that if it does happen, how will they prioritise things. They will not be called out as a doctor or as a paramedic. Nowadays we have paramedics who may have formerly been patient transport officers. They do not act in both roles. They possibly act as intensive care paramedics. They will do as much as they are clinically trained to do. I would like to see in the future a further education of our paramedics. I have been to Mount Isa where we have this rural and remote training.

We are developing a system where the Queensland Ambulance Service has entered into an agreement with JCU—James Cook University—to appoint an academic paramedic. We are exploring the demand for service in rural and remote areas. We are exploring the opportunities for extended

paramedic practice in the primary care sector in rural and remote Queensland and to develop a framework for the curriculum to upskill paramedics to meet the demands of these roles. The intention of the QAS in developing a core curriculum for upgrade to service provision in these environments is to improve health services, particularly in rural and remote communities.

The Queensland Ambulance Service primary care paramedic initiative is currently considering options for expanded scope of practice for paramedics to assist existing health service providers in Queensland communities. Some of the proposed health provision functions being canvassed include health assessment and monitoring, and an example would be diabetic self-management, basic pathology collection and referral; investigative procedures, and a diagnostic ultrasound would be an example; provision of aesthetic technician support; requesting X-ray and basic pathology services; health promotion, whether it be weight control, exercise, falls prevention and substance misuse; minor medical intervention such as suturing and wound management; disease control, and an example could possibly be vaccination; health services, and an example would be identification of frequent Ambulance Service users who may benefit from a referral to a specialist service such as a diabetic or self-management program; continuance of emergency health interventions; and response to injury, accident and medical emergency. Basically, with the current health situation, we want to see if we can lift even further the training and the qualifications of our paramedics, because, as all sides of government would know, it is becoming harder and harder to attract doctors to the bush. Right across the community we often have emergency services in rural and remote areas—

CHAIR: Minister, your time has expired.

Mr ROWELL: Further to this issue, this proposal could reduce the number of paramedics on the road despite the fact that Queensland was promised additional paramedics to soften the blow of the ambulance levy. What sorts of staff reductions and cuts in service delivery should we be bracing ourselves for?

Mr CUMMINS: There will be no reduction in service. There will be no reduction in costs. I will just mention—I do not know if I have today—that we are rolling out 350 extra paramedics over four years; 240 paramedics in this term of government. That is an increase, not a decrease. So the basis of your question was wrong. We are improving services, not reducing them.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, I refer to page 4 of the MPS. It refers to the 70 paramedics as part of the 240 over three years—that is basically what the MPS is saying—which commenced in 2004-05 to address the growth in demand, maintain emergency response times and improve services to isolated and remote communities. I note that for the 2005-06 period there is an additional 80 staff on page 8. The output statements are saying that it has gone from 2,848 to 2,928 for the Ambulance Service. Minister, frequently you quote this figure. Can you advise if the natural attrition of paramedics who leave the service is included in the 70 additional paramedics which really represents only 2,445 of the 2,848 staff of the Ambulance Service?

Mr CUMMINS: The figures I quoted are above the attrition.

Mr ROWELL: So you have taken into account the attrition rate?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes. It is above the attrition rate. That is additional.

Mr ROWELL: I refer to page 15 of the MPS under 'Quality' and refer to the line 'Level of employee satisfaction' in the 'Suboutput Statement' for the 'Ambulance Community and Business Service' for access to quality training programs. In the survey, out of the 75 per cent that was expected to receive satisfaction, the estimated actual for 2004-05 was only 37.71 per cent satisfied. Why were these such major declines in satisfaction with the quality of training? Were there other programs that trainees expressed similar concern about?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to again thank the member for the question. As I travel around the state—and I travel extensively to all areas—the roll-out of the increase in numbers of paramedics across Queensland is greatly appreciated. The improvements to their training et cetera are greatly appreciated. I make no apologies about our roster reform, because roster reform has been worked through with the Miscellaneous Workers Union, which represents the vast majority of QAS paramedics. It agrees with the government—or the government agrees with it—in ensuring a reduction of 14 hours down to 10 hours.

As far as staff satisfaction goes, by increasing funding, by improving the stations and the work environments and by improving the vehicles that they use, it all comes back to funding of over \$100 million from the community ambulance cover. We do not want to go back to the old days of the chocolate wheel and the chook raffles, of paramedics having to work in their down time trying to raise funds to do those types of things. We want to make sure that we have a secure funding base. The vast majority of paramedics have been far happier in the past 15 years under a Labor government than the way that the National Party government left the QATB. The QATB was run down. It was badly organised. We are serving more people than ever before.

We have had a 10 per cent increase in code 1s in the last financial year. We have approximately 68,000 people moving to Queensland each and every year, and with that comes about 6,000 extra code 1s each and every year. Our paramedics are working far harder and far smarter than ever before. They

have far better equipment. They will enjoy the rosters in future, as it is proven to be working in a more humane way. To say that we should be working 14 hours is not, in my opinion, humane. Staff satisfaction in training has been significantly impacted on with the growth in demand for service—that is, additional demand means less time for training—and this is being corrected through the current initiatives that I have spoken about.

Mr ROWELL: In many instances, Minister, people are paying four and five times for that particular privilege that you are talking about. Can you provide us the figures as far as the attrition rate is concerned with those people who are actually going to be leaving both the fire service and the Ambulance Service over the next three years?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I can provide them. If I cannot provide them by the end of the session, I will take them on notice.

Mr ROWELL: That is fine. I refer to the helicopter staffing. I refer to page 11 of the MPS and the department's implementation of recommendations arising from the reviews into the aeromedic system. What is the current number of intensive care paramedics? How many of these paramedics are currently involved in aeromedical retrievals? In some instances, are the intensive care paramedics refusing to go on certain helicopters because of the risk factor, and are they adequately covered as far as insurance is concerned?

Mr CUMMINS: I will answer the last one first. Yes, they are covered. With regard to your second last question, it is voluntary to be a part of aeromedical operations within the QAS. We do not force any paramedics onto helicopters. So I say it is voluntary. I forget the first part of your question. I apologise.

Mr ROWELL: Are some intensive care paramedics refusing to go on certain helicopters?

Mr CUMMINS: It is voluntary.

Mr ROWELL: It is voluntary. So, if they do not want to go on them, it is their choice.

Mr CUMMINS: If they do not want to go on them, they will not go on them. That is what voluntary is about.

Mr ROWELL: I want to talk about the lifesavers, and I refer to page 24 of the MPS and the initiatives delivered as part of the DES volunteer support package. Will you take steps to ensure that our beaches remain safe and legislate for the volunteer lifesavers to receive protection under the emergency services act in line with other emergency service volunteers?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. The Royal Life Saving Club, which covers Ithaca Beach and Bulcock Beach at Caloundra, is celebrating its centenary this year. Centenaries normally are, I believe, of 100 years and that is why it is celebrating this year. It does a great job. Last week I met with the lifeguard group which works in with councils. Councils provide lifeguards for the beaches on the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast areas. The Beattie government continues to provide substantial funding to Surf Life Saving Queensland along with the Volunteer Marine Rescue Association of Queensland, the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association and the two clubs of the Royal Life Saving Society which I mentioned earlier.

This funding supports the operations and vital public safety activities of these associations. In 2004-05 under the service agreement my department provided in excess of \$3.079 million to Surf Life Saving Queensland and will provide the same grant this financial year. Commencing 1 July 2004 as part of the 2004 Beattie government election commitments, an additional \$300,000 is provided over three years—\$100,000 each year—to Surf Life Saving Queensland for rescue equipment and communication equipment. This equipment will benefit Life Saving support services and surf-lifesaving clubs. In 2004-05 under a service agreement the department provided a total of \$49,300 to the Royal Surf Life Saving Society of Queensland for the operation of the two clubs that I mentioned, a grant that we will be providing again in 2005-06. In 2005 the Royal Life Saving Society celebrates its centenary of lifesaving in Queensland, and my department has supported the centenary celebrations by providing \$3,300 by becoming a bronze sponsor. In 2004-05 under a service agreement the department provided a total of \$1,173,530 to the VMR Association, and I would like to put on record the great work done by Ron Melton and Alan Brunner from the CDRS.

Mr ROWELL: I think the important issue you forgot to cover is whether they are covered by an indemnity.

Mr CUMMINS: The answer is that they are covered, as all volunteers are covered and as all staff are covered. I think in previous years—I am not trying to be smart—you asked about rural fire volunteers, and they are covered as well. Anyone who is working under the umbrella of the Department of Emergency Services is covered.

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

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, can you please advise the committee on how important it is to continue to enhance the community safety programs that QFRS currently delivers?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. It is a timely opportunity because it is a tragedy. We are in winter, as we all acknowledge, and it is around this time of the year that more people die in fire related incidents in Queensland. Sadly, we lose about 10 people each year. Most die because they do not have a working smoke alarm installed. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's Operation Safehome aims to change those tragic statistics by increasing smoke alarm installations. More than 13,000 household safety audits have been conducted since the Operation Safehome was initiated in the year 2000, and another 2,300 were completed in the 2004-05 financial year. Despite operational requirements, the QFRS is able to conduct almost 100 per cent of requested visits within a few weeks of the request being made, and I know that many members often speak so highly of Operation Safehome. I was very pleased to see that Madonna King from the *Courier-Mail* recently promoted this program in her column and radio program after she had utilised the program. I would like to publicly thank her and I will be writing to her as well, because it is one of those things that we need to get out and get more people involved with.

In this financial year the program will be significantly enhanced with a complete update of the program's resource materials, training and marketing. This has been achieved with very generous sponsorship from—I will give them a plug—NRMA Insurance which has continued to contribute funds and expertise to the upgrade. We are very grateful to NRMA Insurance, and the sponsorship is \$70,000 per annum for three years from 2005-07. The initiative is developed by operational firefighters to households interested in receiving advice about improving safety in their homes. Firefighters provide advice about a number of home safety issues including fire prevention, smoke alarms, installation, evacuation planning, electrical safety, security issues, general safety and insurance. Householders are provided with a check list for future reference and assisted with any other issues that may be identified.

In 2004-05 enhancements were made to the program including the implementation of a statewide centralised contract centre and improved evaluation of the program. In May 2005 an evaluation was completed of a trial that began in central-north and far-north Queensland of a safe home related initiative, rental fire safety, targeting people who are living in rental homes. Key findings of that evaluation show that there was a significant increase in the number of tenants contacting real estate agents and requesting smoke alarms, and property owners also becoming more proactive with one in every five owners replacing smoke alarm batteries. As a result of this trial, I am happy to announce today that the initiative will be rolled out for the rest of the state during this financial year. Other key initiatives that improve fire safety preparedness and contribute to the protection of people and property are funded within this year's budget.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, we continue to see the spectrum of terrorism raised throughout the Asia-Pacific region and, indeed, in many parts of the world. I note on page 19 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement the Counter Disaster and Rescue Services counter-terrorism planning services guidelines. How else is your department working to ensure Queensland is prepared for a terrorist incident?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. I know he has joined with me in visiting QCESA, which is one of the facilities which I extend an invitation again to all members of parliament to visit. Our thoughts and prayers go out to all of those affected in those atrocious events in London recently. I would like to congratulate the emergency services on their rapid and highly professional response and commend the English people as a whole—all of the British—in their determination and resolve to defy such barbarism. It is a truly heartening example for us all.

I am very pleased to say that the Beattie government is at the forefront of counter-terrorism planning in Australia. In saying that, we do need to remain constantly vigilant. We are working closely with our counterparts at a national level including Emergency Management Australia. Minister Phillip Ruddock, the Attorney-General, who oversees EMA visited our Cannon Hill special operations and Queensland Combined Emergency Services facilities yesterday. I have no hesitation in saying he was quite impressed. He was very appreciative that I had put forward the invitation for him to have a look and—again, as a government—we are committed to working with the federal government in these areas. Our relationship is crucial, not only to ensure that these arrangements and legislative approach to counter-terrorism are consistent with wider national policy, but also that our capability is harmonised with emergency arrangements in other agencies right across Australia.

Our Counter Disaster and Rescue Services through to the Disaster Management Act 2003 provides Queensland with the structures, the functions and the powers required to facilitate disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery in all foreseeable circumstances. While we have the framework in place, we are also able to back it up on the ground. My department's counter-terrorism response capability draws on the expertise of all three emergency services in the particular areas of major events and mass casualty—planning, chemical, biological, radiological incendiary and explosive response, and technical rescue.

The QFRS provides a number of response capabilities including urban search and rescue, hazardous materials management and major events planning, and also manages the Australian government chemical biological radiological enhancement program. The Queensland Ambulance Service, through its special operations and mass casualty planning unit, enables the department to

respond to large-scale medical emergencies demonstrated through Queensland in the world-class response to the Boxing Day tsunami which I touched on earlier.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, over recent weeks we have seen State Emergency Service volunteers involved in a number of high-profile searches, and I note on page 23 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement your department delivered a range of equipment to volunteers last year. How will you be supporting SES volunteers this year?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. Firstly, again I want to say what a great job not only the staff but also the volunteers do right across Queensland in the Department of Emergency Services. The member for Ipswich West is right—very right. SES volunteers have been involved in a number of high-profile searches lately and I recently had the pleasure of hosting a barbecue to thank those involved in the Moreton Island search. That was a very high-profile search where we found that South American person who was lost. Amongst hundreds of other tasks, SES volunteers put in a tremendous effort responding to the Gold Coast floods in recent weeks including their efforts with the Currumbin Hill landslip, which I visited with the Premier on Monday. Early in the year they were heavily involved in the massive preparations for the crossing of Tropical Cyclone Ingrid in north Queensland—probably one of the worst cyclones that Australia has ever seen.

Let me say that the government values all our Emergency Services volunteers. We have around 85,000 people who selflessly devote their time to volunteer in Emergency Services and greatly assist in their communities. With around 14,000 active volunteers, the SES makes up a significant proportion of this with the majority of their work undertaken behind the scenes rather than in the media spotlight. As part of our commitment, the department will continue to recognise, support, train and safeguard these volunteers to ensure their continuing ability to provide excellent service in an increasingly demanding service delivery environment. They truly are our angels in orange.

We will continue to ensure that our SES volunteers are well resourced and able to respond to the many challenges they face. The 2005-06 budget includes \$3.1 million for SES volunteer equipment, training and support—part of a three-year \$9.5 million Beattie government volunteer support package. The government also continues to support the SES through its supporting Emergency Services volunteers initiatives as well as the additional \$1.5 million three-year regional service delivery initiative. This ongoing funding to SES volunteers supports a range of initiatives including communication equipment, purchase of rescue equipment, flood boat replacement and vehicle and local government accommodation subsidies and purchase of additional personal protective clothing.

The department has committed \$2.46 million in 2005-06 including the provision of replacing the flood boats to benefit six SES groups, wet/cool weather jackets to benefit 600 volunteers, an additional set of overalls to benefit 1,500 volunteers, replacement of vertical rescue equipment and associated training to the value of \$340,000, replacement of road accident rescue equipment to the value of \$180,000, replacement of rescue trailers to benefit up to six SES groups, a range of communication equipment to the value of \$100,000 plus \$160,000 in base funding and workplace health and safety support and policy developments. All volunteers will benefit through induction training, which is about \$80,000 worth.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, could you outline for the committee the work undertaken by the Department of Emergency Services in the provision of a mass casualty response to the 163 passengers and crew from the tilt train derailment near Bundaberg in November 2004?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I will. Thank you very much for the question. My department's response in November 2004 to the tilt train incident was nothing short of world class. The numerous accounts given by the passengers all said the same thing. It was an extremely well coordinated rescue and recovery effort delivered by ambulance, fire, police, SES staff and volunteers, and I think there were even rural fires helping. There were many stories of courage and heroism from the tilt train derailment of which Queenslanders should be very proud. In the instance of an emergency incident on such a large scale, my department reviews the response and looks for any areas of possible improvement. The fact that this large-scale operation went off basically without a hitch is a testament to the professionalism through thorough training and sheer hard work put in by all emergency service teams that night.

Operationally, as soon as the enormity of the incident was realised, senior departmental officers formed a major incident team at Emergency Services headquarters at Kedron to coordinate the whole operation. The department's regional commissioners and area directors all worked together as a cohesive team to communicate developments from the scene to the major incident team. This very professional team worked smoothly and efficiently through this large incident and effected the very best outcome for all involved. Thirty ambulance vehicles with 71 crew, six Queensland Fire and Rescue Service trucks with 36 crew, one rural fire service crew, five SES crews and three rescue helicopters initially attended the derailment. The QAS dispatched local crews as well as units from surrounding areas including Hervey Bay, Childers, Rockhampton, Gin Gin, Boyne Island and Gladstone. Firefighters from Bundaberg, Gladstone, Miriam Vale, Rockhampton, Gin Gin and the Rosedale Rural Fire Brigade were first on the scene and were later joined by a specialist rescue officer from Brisbane.

The firefighters used rescue equipment commonly known as the jaws of life to open four carriage doors, conducted searches for passengers and were also involved in making safe a major diesel leak. These crews were all supported by a large number of behind-the-scenes staff in Brisbane and in regional centres such as Bundaberg, Rockhampton and Gladstone. One of my main priorities is making sure the department has the resources to deliver the best preparation and training available. The level of organisation shown by my department is one of the key reasons that the response to the derailment was so efficient, professional and ultimately successful. As well as participation in the rescue, the department ensured there was still emergency coverage in those areas for other Queenslanders. The exceptional level of cooperation between the various agencies involved is to be applauded. The interaction and cooperation between our agencies in Queensland is the envy of other states and is something that is repeatedly raised with me when I travel interstate.

It is very pleasing to know that we are working together better than ever before. As emergency services response to the London bombings has shown, proper planning and preparation are essential elements of a successful response. I believe our response to the tilt train derailment is clear evidence that our planning and preparations are obviously paying dividends.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, I note on page 26 of the MPS that it states the Counter Disaster and Rescue Service has significantly exceeded its targeted level of volunteer satisfaction. You have already told us here today that you have many volunteers across several organisations but what is your department doing to support these volunteers?

Mr CUMMINS: Thank you very much; it is a very good question. I am delighted to see that the volunteer satisfaction target was not only reached but it was actually exceeded. As I have mentioned and as you have touched on, about 85,000 Emergency Services volunteers are operating in communities right across Queensland. I am not overstating the case when I say that we simply could not operate without them. These volunteers range from the SES and rural firefighters to surf-lifesavers and volunteer marine rescue organisations, coastguard and similar. Our people are the most important asset in the Department of Emergency Services and it is essential that they are satisfied and feel that their efforts are valued and supported. One way the Beattie government is doing that is through our volunteer support funding package of \$21.83 million over three years. Through this increased funding package, my department is able to deliver the best training, equipment and resources possible.

I have already mentioned that in 2005-06 we have committed \$2.46 million to provide replacement flood boats to benefit six SES groups, a PPE, wet/cool weather jackets to benefit 600 volunteers, an additional set of overalls for 1,500 active volunteers, replacement vertical rescue equipment and associated training, replacement road accident rescue equipment, replacement rescue trailers to benefit six SES groups, a range of communication equipment including 200 hand-held radios and 20 repeater bases and workplace health and safety support and policy development that benefits all volunteers. No-one can argue that our people are the greatest asset in the Department of Emergency Services and they deserve the best equipment possible to support them in their duties. These allocations are direct evidence of our government's commitment to delivering that equipment.

I would like to put on record my appreciation of the support of the local governments right across Queensland and the Local Government Association of Queensland. The success of many of our volunteer groups across the state is in part due to the close working relationship they have built with their local councils. To assist in that, we are providing support for local councils and community groups through ongoing local government grants for administration costs; ongoing accommodation subsidies for new or upgraded facilities; ongoing SES motor vehicle subsidies, including motor vehicle accessory subsidies and registration insurance; and ongoing volunteer executive allowances.

I am very satisfied with the work our volunteers are doing throughout the state as well as my department's support of their efforts. I am very pleased to see that they are so satisfied with us as well. That said, we need to look to the future and a key way we are doing this is through the Emergency Services Cadet Scheme, which celebrates 10 years of operation this year. Originally known as SES Cadets, I relaunched the new-look Emergency Services Cadets in May last year, and the Queensland Ambulance Service and Queensland Fire and Rescue Service are now formally included in the Department of Emergency Services Cadet Program.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: The CPR for Life program in schools has been very successful right across Queensland. Could you please outline how this program has benefited students in Queensland and how you propose to enhance this initiative to other areas of the community?

Mr CUMMINS: Yes, I would be very pleased to. I thank you for the question. I think we should all share your passion for CPR for Life. On the weekend we held a community cabinet in the chairman's electorate where I met a lady called Beth Coombes. She is the Gold Coast trainer of CPR for Life. She spoke with me on how enjoyable it is and how great an initiative it is. It was formerly known as CPR 2000. We have now rebadged it CPR for Life, for obvious reasons. The Beattie government is committed to community safety, and 2005-06 will see most years 11 and 12 state school students attend CPR for Life awareness programs. The CPR for Life program is a \$1.3 million, three-year, Smart State initiative to provide free training in CPR courses in Queensland. Our government widely acknowledged

the importance of all Queenslanders knowing how to perform the potentially lifesaving skill of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

Most cardiac arrests occur in the home and are witnessed by loved ones. It has been highlighted by research undertaken that early bystander intervention is a critical factor in cardiac arrest survival rates, yet disturbingly of more than 3,000 cardiac arrests in Queensland each year only 31 per cent received CPR. So slightly fewer than one in three people who could do with CPR receive it. If a person calls 000 and commences CPR then their actions will give the patient the best possible chance of a good outcome. CPR is the second link in the chain of survival, a concept that illustrates the importance of knowing what to do when faced with a cardiac arrest emergency.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated to questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Hinchinbrook.

Mr ROWELL: Minister, page 28 of the MPS refers to the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service's role in improving community safety. I refer to your recent decision to name and shame budget accommodation providers in state parliament. How many of the 64 businesses that were referred to in parliament have since been found to be compliant?

Mr CUMMINS: That is a very good question, and I thank you for it. I will quickly touch on the attrition rates for Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and the Queensland Ambulance Service, if I may. As at March 2005, the turnover rate for the Queensland Ambulance Service is 2.57 per cent. So that is a decrease in the turnover from the previous year. As at March 2005, the turnover rate for QFRS is 2.73 per cent—again, that is a similar rate to the previous year. I think our attrition rates are extremely low.

None of us want to see another tragedy like the Childers backpacker fire. Members are aware that on 11 April 2002 the Building and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2002, known as BOLA, was passed by parliament and commenced in 1 July 2002. The BOLA legislation establishes a range of fire safety criteria, including the installation and maintenance of various fire safety systems and the requirement of a fire safety management plan. All budget accommodation buildings, irrespective of the date of construction, were required to have a fire safety management plan in by 1 July 2003. Those buildings that were built, approved for construction or applied for approval prior to 1992 were also required to have early warning and emergency lighting as a minimum by 1 July 2003. In 2004-05 the government enhanced the capability of the State Community Safety Unit in the north coast and south-eastern regions by increasing staff levels.

The functions of these new offices include improving fire safety in budget accommodation through the delivery of awareness, education and training on specific fire safety related issues to local government authorities and to building owner/occupiers. This training and education is provided to ensure a high level of compliance prior to the implementation of further BOLA legislative requirements effective from 1 July 2005. On 19 May 2005, the Building Amendment Bill 2005 received assent to clarify the existing definition of a budget accommodation building to ensure its consistency with the original intent of parliament. Only buildings that are caught by this clarified definition are required to undertake fire safety upgrades.

For some budget accommodation owners, compliance may be required in two separate time frames. All budget accommodation buildings, irrespective of the date of construction, were required to have a fire safety management plan by 1 July 2003. Those buildings that were built, approved for construction or applied for approval were also required as at July 2003.

With regard to the BOLA legislation that took effect from 1 July 2005, a whole-of-government strategy with the Department of Local Government and Planning as lead agent was currently being implemented. This strategy is focusing on training, supporting and encouraging local government to provide direct advice to owners. The BOLA inspections have ensured that the minimum level of safety mandated by the government has been achieved. This outcome contributed to increased safety within backpacker accommodation in tourism industries. We will continue to do that because it is in everyone's interest and to everyone's benefit to have the best possible fire safety budget accommodation in this state.

Mr ROWELL: That really did not answer my question. I refer to page 18 of the MPS and the department's implementation of the dangerous goods legislation. There is an issue of inadequate training for QRFS personnel in areas where dangerous chemicals are located. How many site verification audits have been undertaken of Queensland's 27 major hazardous facilities and what did they conclude?

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the member for the question. As I have stated, with a record budget we are continuing to improve on the response that we can make to hazmat, hazardous material, and obviously with BA, breathing apparatus. My department has committed over \$340,000 in 2005-06 to the continued implementation of the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act 2001. This funding will support the training and coordination from our inspectorate and authorise officers from other agencies as well as the regulation of major hazard facilities.

CHEM services has now classified 31 major hazard facilities under the act. These major hazard facilities include oil refineries, chemical processing facilities, LPG storage facilities, explosives storage facilities and chemical warehouses. To provide a holistic regulatory approach to the control of Queensland's major hazard facilities, CHEM services has established multidisciplinary teams to monitor and ensure compliance. To date, 27 such teams have been established and trained. The teams include representatives from local government, Workplace Health and Safety Queensland, the EPA, DNRM, CHEM services and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service.

CHEM services' responsibility for major hazard facilities regulation includes assessing the adequacy of risk assessments, safety management systems and emergency plans which combine to form the safety reports submitted by the occupiers; advising on compliance issues; also conducting periodic safety audits at major hazard facilities; issuing directives to effect corrective action where necessary; and investigating major accidents at major hazard facilities should they occur. The target for audits completed in 2004-05 was initially set at 12 and later revised to eight. CHEM services audited five major hazard facilities during the year.

Since 2002 the basic training for authorised officers has been delivered 36 times in Brisbane and regional centres with nearly 500 officers trained. The training addressing regulatory, technical, practical and administrative issues associated with the authorised officer role is tailored to address the interests of each agency in the Dangerous Goods Safety Management Act enforcement. In addition, my department delivers refresher and update training every six months to authorised officers from enforcement agencies to maintain the knowledge and skills required in basic training.

My department also provides advice to businesses and other government departments and members of the public on all aspects of hazardous materials, storage and handling. The department receives over 1,200 calls a year and up to 10 calls a day for the specialist scientific staff who are tasked with handling them. This day-to-day contact with the public is a background but vital activity for my department and a further example of the expert services we provide to the community to enhance its safety.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated to questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Keppel.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I note that page 33 of the MPS refers to geographical information systems for use during emergencies. How will this assist our firefighters on the ground?

Mr CUMMINS: I thank the member for the question. I apologise. Earlier the member for Hinchinbrook referred to the 60-odd properties that had been named—27 are now the only number that are not compliant.

Mr ROWELL: So a greater proportion are compliant.

Mr CUMMINS: It was best to name them and make sure that they did something about it. In answer to the member for Keppel's question, as such a vast state, Queensland enjoys a wide variety of climate vegetation and topography. This means that we experience a wide range of bushfire conditions, dependent on those conditions. From severe fires in the dry eucalypt forests of the mountain ranges of coastal Queensland to the extensive grassfires in areas such as the Mitchell grass plains of western Queensland, we need to support our firefighters in all conditions.

One important tool in that is our development of geographical information systems, or the GIS. This contains a number of components including the state iZone identification atlas, the OPMSMaps web mapping application, and the location-specific operational plans, or LSOPs, for iZone risk areas. The benefit of GIS lies in the fact that this is delivering high-quality mapping information to those on the ground at the fire front. This will serve not only to improve the fire service delivery but also to improve the safety of our firefighters.

Sensibly, a high priority for the GIS is the area that has been dubbed—and I have touched on it today—the iZone. This is the area of high importance, because throughout Queensland we are seeing more and more development of these outer urban areas—it is where the brick and tiles basically grow into the bush. Earlier this year the government announced a \$2.95 million bushfire response enhancement package to deliver a range of initiatives in these high-risk urban rural interface areas. This includes nearly \$1 million for 10 iZone four-by-four medium attack fire trucks, which will be strategically located at positions around south-east Queensland to enable rapid deployment as a strike team.

At the Bundaberg fire championships at the weekend I actually saw first-hand one of these new fire trucks. I think it will be based at Gympie. I was joined by some rural fireies who inspected it. The working relationship between the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, the permanents and the auxiliaries, and the rural firefighters has never been as good as it is now. I would like to commend all those who have been involved in the iZone because we are making great achievements and, as a government, we should be very proud of the way we are funding it.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio relating to the Minister for Emergency Services. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and his advisers for their attendance today.

Mr CUMMINS: I would like to thank the officers of my department and all of my ministerial office staff for their involvement in the budget estimates process. This process, I believe, is a great opportunity for the department to review departmental outputs and align our services with the Beattie government's priorities. Mr Chairman, I thank you for your stewardship of the estimates committee today. I and the department look forward to delivering the marvellous initiatives that we have outlined for the people of Queensland from the Gold Coast to the cape and west to the border. Once again, thank you very much. Have a good afternoon and may God bless.

Proceedings suspended 3.20 pm to 3.34 pm

ESTIMATES COMMITTEE G—ENVIRONMENT, LOCAL GOVERNMENT, PLANNING AND WOMEN

In Attendance

Hon. D Boyle, Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women

Environmental Protection Agency

Mr J Purtill, Director-General

Mr A Feely, Executive Director, Parks

Mr N O'Sullivan, Director, Financial Management Branch, Corporate Development

Department of Local Government, Planning and Women

Dr T Campbell, Director-General

Ms M Hoekstra, General Manager, Corporate Services

Mr P Bettess, Deputy Director-General and General Manager, Local Government

Mr M Barrie, Manager, Community Governance Division

Mr A Kuru, General Manager, Building Codes Queensland

CHAIR: The Estimates Committee G hearing is now resumed. The next portfolio to be examined relates to Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. In the event that those attending today are not aware, I point out that the proceedings today are similar to parliament to the extent that members of the public cannot ask questions. In that regard, I remind visitors that, in accordance with standing order 286, any person admitted to the public hearing of the committee may be excluded by order of the committee.

I remind members of the committee and the minister that the time limit for questions is one minute and three minutes for the answer. A warning bell will ring once 15 seconds before the end of these time limits and twice when the time has expired. I will allow more time for answers if the questioner consents.

The standing orders require that at least half of the time for questions at today's hearing is allocated to non-government members. Government members and non-government members of the committee will take turns in asking questions in blocks of equal time. I ask departmental witnesses to identify themselves before they answer questions so that Hansard can record that information in the transcript. Please also ensure that mobile phones and pagers are switched off while in the chamber so as not to disrupt the proceedings. The time allotted to the portfolio of Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women is three hours and 15 minutes, with a 15-minute break at 5.00 pm.

I declare the proposed expenditure for the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women open for examination. The question before the committee is—

That the proposed expenditure be agreed to.

Minister, would you like to make a brief introductory statement or do you wish to proceed directly to questions? If you do wish to make a statement, the committee asks that you limit it to five minutes.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, Mr Chair and members of the committee. I would like to make an opening statement. As Queenslanders, we are living in a time of rapid change. No longer a sleepy backwater, Queensland is now the nation's prime mover. In Queensland we are seeing more economic growth, more jobs growth and more population growth than in any other Australian state. While that is great news for our economy, it presents enormous challenges for state and local governments and puts a great deal of pressure on our environment.

Today's examination of the budgets for the Environmental Protection Agency and the department of local government and planning will reveal quite clearly that we are more than facing up to the challenges that stem from growth. Growth means more development, more demands for open space, a more careful approach to energy consumption and a greater urgency to protect our special places before they are gone. It is this concern for our environment—in essence, our quality of life—that is front and centre on the agendas of both of my departments.

Today is my first budget estimates hearing as environment minister, having been appointed to the position in August last year. Little did I appreciate at that time just how well my two portfolio responsibilities would fit together. The opportunities to work cooperatively are substantial. While, on the one hand, we are protecting biodiversity through the creation of more national parks and more rangers to manage them, on the other hand we are working hard to give local government the tools to improve

the local environment with the legislation of grey water use and consideration of mandating energy-saving measures for new houses. We are lifting standards for water and sewerage infrastructure while providing a major boost to councils to help them meet the cost of this more environmentally friendly infrastructure. More and more councils are stepping up to the plate and meeting the state government's expectations in this regard.

Water recycling and water reclamation, once unheard of, are fast becoming commonplace. The department of local government and the Environmental Protection Agency are as one in their determination to reduce sewage outfalls into our waterways. One is the standard setter and the other has the means to financially assist councils to meet the standards, improve the quality of local waterways and decrease the demand for water through treating and reusing water for irrigation and industry purposes.

Funding for councils in 2005-06 will be \$593 million, up from \$553 million last year. Some \$3.25 million has been allocated to the EPA to investigate integrated water management and conservation in south-east Queensland. Both departments are working with me to protect our coastline from the impacts of development and increasingly outdated farming practices. I am currently investigating ways in which we can provide new tools to councils to better enforce development conditions that require the containment of the run-off that is damaging our coastline and waterways.

The EPA is hosting a major conference in Cairns in September on erosion and sediment control. The conference will focus on best practice means of addressing environmental risks from urban, coastal, agricultural and mining development. Our message to builders, developers, farmers and industry is plan wisely and with sustainability in mind, adopt new practices, have a care for our environment, and know that we are watching and will strongly enforce development conditions.

In 2005-06 we intend to deliver over one million hectares of new national park, 58 new rangers and major spending on visitor infrastructure in acknowledgment of the benefits national parks bring to our tourism economy and the 6,000 indirect jobs they generate. We will spend an extra \$58 million in recurrent funding and \$25 million in capital funding over the next four years. We will boost spending on Cape York by \$8.1 million over the next two years, increasing the protected area estate to 2.4 million hectares, and we will provide the resources necessary to manage this larger area. Planning has been a major focus throughout 2005-05, and this will continue over the next year. By Christmas 2005, 109 of the 123 IPA schemes will be in place, with all but three finalised by the end of this financial year.

The last word in my opening statement should go, as is only appropriate, to women. 2005 marks the centenary of women gaining the right to vote. While much has been achieved for women over the century, there is more that remains to be done to ensure access, equity, safety and security for the women of Queensland.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The first round of questions are from non-government members. I call the member for Lockyer.

Mr RICKUSS: I thank the minister and her departmental staff for coming in for questions. I refer to page 1-17 of the MFS and note 5, the output income statement, which refers to the reduction in grants and subsidies relating to the following programs: solar hot water rebates, photovoltaic rebates, working property rebates, purchase of green energy programs, renewable energy diesel replacement programs and national packaging covenants. Can you provide an outline of the funding that has been cut from each of these programs and what was the reason in each instance?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I will ask the director-general to specify some of the amounts. Might I particularly comment to you on the end of the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme. That has been widely known to be coming to an end on 30 June 2005 and has been a matter of some consideration for me. There is no doubt that the rebate scheme has been very successful to the extent that those who have received the rebates have really benefited from them and have been pleased with their systems. Surveying says that around 75 per cent have been very pleased with the solar hot water systems that they have in place. Nonetheless, the hard facts are that, as popular as it has been, it has not led to widespread uptake of solar hot water systems throughout Queensland. You would be aware, therefore, that through the sustainability housing discussion paper we have decided to investigate mandating solar hot water systems in new housing and, for that reason, have not extended the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme at this time. James Purtil, would you like to comment on the others?

Mr Purtil: Sure. Ian, could you just go through again which ones you wanted to talk about? The minister has covered the Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme.

Mr RICKUSS: Photovoltaic rebates, working property rebates, purchase of green energy programs, renewable energy diesel replacement programs and the National Packaging Covenant.

Mr Purtil: The National Packaging Covenant funding was effective as of the date of publication of these notes. In the interim period, the Cabinet Budget Review Committee has reviewed a request to meet Queensland's obligations for that national program, which will be in the vicinity of half a million dollars per year for the duration of the next National Packaging Covenant. At the time of the preparation of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement, that was the funding that was available. A number of the other

programs—the photovoltaic program and the diesel rebates—are Commonwealth programs. I would have to get you the exact details on those, but they are Commonwealth programs that have terminated.

Mr RICKUSS: Are they operated through your department?

Mr Purtill: Through the Sustainable Industries Division in collaboration with the Commonwealth.

Mr RICKUSS: What was the reason for ending the purchase of green energy program? Was that one of yours?

CHAIR: You must direct that question through the minister.

Ms BOYLE: The question is what was the reason for ending—

Mr RICKUSS: The green energy programs.

Mr Purtill: The green energy purchasing for government program will continue, the quantum of which I cannot report because that is part of the development of a new energy policy which is not yet in place.

Mr RICKUSS: I refer you to page 1-17 of the MPS. I note that the output statement refers to your decision to cut the solar allowance. Why was the decision made to remove the rebate for home owners at the time when you were you trying to encourage home owners to rely on solar hot-water systems as an alternative to electricity?

Ms BOYLE: I think I have already substantially addressed that question. There is no doubt that in Queensland we can save much in terms of energy usage by using solar hot-water systems or greenhouse efficient hot-water systems in our houses. The Solar Hot Water Rebate Scheme was introduced by the Goss government and abolished, I have to say, by the Borbidge government and then reinstated by the Beattie government, but time limited. It was always intended, as rebates are, not to be permanent and run forever, but rather to stimulate the market. At the time, the costs of solar hot-water services were considerably more than they are now. It was believed that this was the only way to give the industry a boost and also to have solar hot-water heating become more widely known.

To that extent, as I have mentioned to you before, the department of local government looked at the issue of mandating some energy measures and some water- saving devices. It put out a discussion paper along those lines earlier, to which there has been a very enthusiastic response, which is very substantially in favour of mandating devices in new houses. Therefore, it would seem unreasonable to continue with an old program when we are shortly to consider a new program that may lead to much wider uptake.

Mr RICKUSS: In your opening statement you mentioned how energy consumption was always a conscious part of your policy. Minister, will you concede that the decision to abolish or cut funding to at least six green energy programs is a direct contradiction to the Queensland Energy Policy?

Ms BOYLE: The honourable member's question was written before he heard the answers. In light of the responses that you have already heard this afternoon, you would understand that some of them are Commonwealth programs that have not been cut. You have heard the explanation in terms of the solar hot-water system rebate scheme and of us moving to a scheme at a more serious level. So there is a misimpression or a misperception in the language you have used in that we are stepping backwards. We think that we are stepping up to the plate. Encouragement goes only so far with people—even encouragement with some additional dollars attached, as in the rebate scheme. It still goes only so far.

Not only have we been through the sustainable housing discussion paper addressing the issue of whether we should mandate greenhouse efficient hot-water systems in new housing developments, we are also considering what we might do at a later time about refurbishment of existing housing. Another thing that has changed over recent years is the number of major residential subdivisions, particularly in south-east Queensland, where developers are automatically building in rainwater tanks and solar hot-water services at no extra cost to the houses selling in neighbouring subdivisions that do not have such inclusions. I have been to inspect several of these. In fact, Stockland in the Coomera area deserves particular mention for their inclusion in a very large subdivision of solar hot-water services and rainwater tanks. I have been to inspect them and I asked the question of the developers, 'How can you afford to do this if supposedly they are so expensive and they are fancy extras? Yet you are still selling your houses at the same price as those in new subdivisions that do not have such inclusions.' They say that it can be subsumed with bulk buying. That, of course, is the clue. That is the suggestion to us as to why we should mandate the energy and water- saving devices so that they will become very common. The expectation is that over the next five years in Queensland we will have 40,000 new homes each year. That means 40,000 solar hot-water heaters and 40,000 rainwater tanks. If you add up the beneficial impacts of those over each year as that continues, they are very substantial indeed.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS and the 'Protecting Our Natural and Cultural Heritage'. I seek leave to table some photographs that I took when I visited the Carnarvon National Park when I visited there.

Leave granted.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I took these photographs while I was visiting the Carnarvon National Park. You will note the obvious presence of feral horses in the park. Minister, do you concede that your decision to deny horse riders access to old logging trails in the state forest is somewhat hypocritical given that there are potentially thousands of feral horses running wild throughout our national parks?

Ms BOYLE: Pests in national parks, such as horses and feral pigs, are a problem in various spots around the state. We have more money to deal with them and we are rolling out various programs. I will ask Alan Feely, the Executive Director of Queensland Parks and Wildlife, to comment on that in a moment.

I was pleased to visit Carnarvon very recently for the launch of the Carnarvon National Park management plan, to meet with the staff and to have a look at some areas. Of course, I could not cover the whole park—it is huge—in that one visit. In fact, access to some areas is very difficult. I did meet with rangers and inspect some of the areas that are quite frequently visited. There are some magnificent areas, in terms of the experience of bushwalking, and some breathtaking views. That very morning the chief ranger told me about pigs and pointed out some of their tracks in a particular area. She gave me the figures—which I have forgotten—on the success of their baiting program. However, there is further to be done yet. Eradicating them entirely is, indeed, a very difficult job. So far as the issue of horses is concerned, I might ask Alan Feely to talk to you about that.

Mr Feely: I have been to Carnarvon recently to look at the feral animal issues out there. The staff have done a great job. I will take this opportunity to give them a rap. When I was there I met with the adjoining land-holders. After a while, they shared with me the fact that a lot of joint work has been done between the land-holders and the parks staff to the extent that the land-holders organised a working bee on a Saturday morning to shift some heavy bags of cement that my staff were due to shift the following week without the staff knowing. They have a great relationship with the neighbours out there, which is excellent.

In terms of the horse issue, as you probably know, Carnarvon is part of the cattle tick boundary area. We have allocated \$22,000 in this year's budget out of our weed and pest funding to deal with wild cattle and horses in the Carnarvon Gorge national park. I have had a look myself. I have seen some of the impacts from an environmental point of view. We have some fenced off areas that the horses do not have access to and, when you look at them, there are substantial differences in the two ecosystems. I believe that the funding will go a long way toward dealing with that.

In terms of dealing more broadly with feral pests and weeds, we have a \$2 million a year program through which we do a huge amount of work across the state. I can start to go through a list of what we do, if you like?

In terms of Carnarvon, the issue that you are addressing will be well and truly under control with use of that \$22,000 in the next year. That is \$22,000 of operating money, not \$22,000 of salaries. The salaries are over and above that. That is actually direct money.

Mr RICKUSS: Through you, Minister, I have had figures quoted to me of somewhere in the vicinity of 4,000 horses in the Carnarvon National Park. They are doing a lot of damage. Do you feel that \$22,000 will be adequate to start to control that feral pest?

Ms BOYLE: Mr Feely?

Mr Feely: We have \$2 million a year and we have a range of priorities across the state that we put that funding to. I believe that \$22,000 will go a long way towards dealing with it. We will never eradicate wild horses either in a park or on an adjoining property. I do not think anybody thinks that they can actually be eradicated. It will go a long way toward taking the pressure off them.

The issue is to maintain the population at a level that ensures that the environmental impacts are not excessive and that the impacts on neighbours are not excessive. The neighbours are very enthusiastic about being involved in that. They have asked us for a joint program and are very confident that we will deliver that. We will muster and trap them, where possible. Our intent is to remove them. On occasions, we actually make money out of the removal of horses through people trapping them and taking them away. I am confident that \$22,000 is more than adequate for this coming year. If we need more funds in coming years, then we will continue to fund it as we do.

Mr RICKUSS: I hope, Minister—

Ms BOYLE: Might I add to that? We have some time remaining. The beginning of your previous question was about horses not being allowed in national parks. Surely your question bears on why horses and other non-native animals should not be in national parks. Yes, of course, these are wild horses and the kind of damage they cause is greater than that caused by thoroughbreds, which substantially stick to trails. Nonetheless, they bring in weeds, they cause damage and they cause erosion.

Mr RICKUSS: Some of that is up for debate, Minister.

Ms BOYLE: You would be well aware of our alternative trails program and how successful that has been, although it is in its early days yet.

Mr RICKUSS: My next question is on alternative trails. I refer you to page 1-6 of the MPS, 'Protecting Our Natural and Cultural Heritage'. You would be aware of claims that part of the much-heralded Noosa trails network actually went through Lake MacDonald and along the main part of the northern railway line. What action has now been taken to review this trail, given the failure of your government to provide a safe and reliable trail network?

Ms BOYLE: It is far from a failure; it is a great success. When we said, no, the nature conservation act says no non-native animals in national parks, they said, 'Oh but, oh but, oh but,' particularly about horses. We said, 'Horse riding is such important recreation and, yes, of course you are entitled to ride horses, whether for an afternoon as a young or new rider, or for days on end as an endurance rider, and alternative trails are possible. We can have both. We can have national parks of the highest level of biodiversity and protection and we can have a network of world-class horse riding trails.' They said 'We don't believe you can do that'.

As the member for Nicklin well knows, we were able to table a draft of some 236 kilometres of a network of horse riding trails in the Noosa area alone. That is a small proportion of the total number of kilometres that will be the horse riding trails of south-east Queensland. Are the whole 236 kilometres available now? No, that is not so. While the great majority are now available for riding and the great majority are in shaded areas well away from traffic of any kind and are suitable for relatively novice riders as well as endurance riders, some areas are not available now. That is deliberately so for those who did not believe that we could do it and who did not want to give in gracefully said, 'Fancy drawing a dotted line over a waterway. Do you think we are going to ride under water?' Of course we never intended that. That was intended as a designation by a dotted line that further to working with the local council around the edges of those lakes, we could create a spectacular ride in the future.

In fact, we have a map that has just been handed to us by the member for Nicklin with some further suggestions for improving those trails. That was our first draft, and a spectacularly successful first draft—not a final. I am pleased, too, to let you know, in case you are not aware, that we have now released some 203 kilometres in the Gold Coast Hinterland as the second stage in rolling out alternative horse-riding trails. That will bring us up to some 440 kilometres well before the nine years are up, at which stage horse riders will no longer be welcome in our national parks in south-east Queensland.

I do thank the member for Nicklin for his further suggestions and I encourage him, and all of the horse riders that he speaks to, to participate with us to make sure the trails are truly, in every kilometre, rideable and enjoyable.

Mr RICKUSS: I refer to page 1-6 of the MPS and the output 'Protecting our Natural and Cultural Heritage'. What is the total amount paid to the consultant to identify the additional trail networks and what amount has been spent on marketing the trail networks to date?

Ms BOYLE: Not very much is the answer in terms of how much we have spent so far, though I will let others give you the details in a moment. I do not know how much we have paid the consultant but I hope it is a lot. Mr Paul Summers has done a very good job for us. His expertise has been well known for some time. He is no novice to the business of recreation and trails for various purposes, not only horse riders. He has done a magnificent job and I pay full credit to him.

My information is, however, that the cost of his consultancy, which is continuing of course—he is working presently on Mapleton, as I understand it, and some other areas in south-east Queensland—is met through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and so it is not reflected in my budget. What we received as a global budget for the whole project—and I would be sure only a small amount has so far been spent—is \$650,000. That came out of the South-East Queensland Forest Agreement funding and is entirely for the business of creating alternative trails. That means that apart from the consultancy fees that there are now, and apart from some very modest brochures that are being produced for the purposes of designating our final draft of the trails and consulting further and some advertisements for public meetings, we are expecting to have some of those moneys remaining to continue the upgrading of trails.

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

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, I refer to the recent media reports and allegations of widespread bullying and harassment within the EPA. Can you advise what steps are being taken to investigate these claims and what action is being taken to fix the problem?

CHAIR: Order! I actually made a ruling this morning in relation to a non-government question similar to this. I think we will move on to the next question, please.

Mr HOOLIHAN: On page 1-2 there is reference to Queensland's historic cultural heritage being recognised and protected. Can you advise how the recent review of heritage management will assist in delivering this outcome?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to say that our government has been particularly active through the conduct of a cultural heritage review over this last year. I give recognition to my predecessor in the Environment portfolio, Minister Mickel, who commissioned the review. As we would all know, there have been grumbles about the system for some time—grumbles from people who are really concerned that

Queensland is losing its heritage because there are not listings in time. Along comes a development application and at the last minute they attempt to get heritage listing for a building or a site that they believe has tremendous significance and yet the clock is ticking and the development application is in and there is not time, it seems, for an orderly listing in a proper way.

At the same time, developers have complained that in good faith they have bought land that was unencumbered in terms of heritage listings, gone ahead with an application, often got an approval from a council and then there is some kind of heritage hold-up. So what we are looking for is a system that addresses both of those concerns: that does protect Queensland's heritage icons all over the state and that does give certainty to developers, to property owners and even to potential owners that, of course, involves the local government system of our state.

What everybody wants are timely and transparent decisions on nominations to the heritage register and on development applications to places already on the heritage register. We want heritage to be listed clearly—up-front, with certainty—and then we want no surprises in the process that there would be for an owner of a heritage place to go about making some changes, improving, hopefully, on the particular place.

The review that has taken place is still under way. You may be interested to know that we have received some 100 submissions on the heritage discussion paper. They have recommended a wide-ranging number of changes, but what they come to is a more strategic role for the Queensland Heritage Council for levels of listing right across the state of places of local significance as well as places of state significance and places or sites of national significance. It means that we will need all of that \$2.7 million of additional funds to go out and conduct a statewide assessment of historic cultural places. It means that we will need some reforming of the Heritage Council's focus to take them from the minutiae of development applications to really setting in place policies and procedures that will ensure our cultural heritage is protected for all time.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, can I firstly thank you and your staff for keeping the electorate of Pumicestone up to date with all of the issues that are involved in your portfolios. I know that you and all of your staff share my passion for the environment. My question is about koala conservation. I refer to the koala conservation plan and management program strategy mentioned on page 1-7 of the MPS. Can you explain how the proposed plan will protect koalas, what community input has occurred and what issues have been raised in that consultation?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I was not entirely surprised, though I might have been a year ago, to hear a major tourism leader who was visiting Cairns talk about why international tourists are flocking to Australia and to Queensland in particular. He was talking about the icons that Australia has. I expected, hanging around Cairns as I was and aware of the big tourism industry up there, that he was going to say that the No. 1 icon is the Great Barrier Reef, but in fact he said it is not. The Great Barrier Reef is the No. 2 icon. Australia's greatest icon and drawcard to international visitors is the koala.

I dare say most honourable members know that the story in south-east Queensland historically is a disgraceful one whereby koalas were slaughtered. That is why we are in the position now where they are an endangered species. That is why we have to strengthen our koala conservation policy and that is what we have done this year. Our new koala conservation plan has been widely consulted on. We have had 506 submissions—a very substantial response—and many of those, of course, are from individuals who really recognise the importance of the koala in south-east Queensland and the pressure there is for us to have ways to recognise and identify significant areas of koala habitat; to put in place development controls to ensure that, while there may well be development commitments and that these should proceed, they proceed in such a manner as to still be mindful of the precious areas of habitat; to provide for corridors; and to ensure that the design of fences, roads and landscaped areas is such as not to intrude unnecessarily on habitat.

Eighty per cent of those submissions called for stronger laws to protect koalas. I am really pleased to let members know that this is not just the environment minister carrying on about koalas or some people in south-east Queensland who care, but that the government takes this so seriously and the koala conservation plan has such standing that it has been incorporated into the SEQ Regional Plan.

Behind the policy itself are draft guidelines for how development can occur in those urban areas of south-east Queensland in areas of significant habitat. Those draft guidelines are very detailed. It is a thick wad, some couple of inches—five or six centimetres thick, at least—and they are available now for consultation. It will give us a matter of some months to see whether we can protect the koalas while at the same time allowing developers their rights to continue.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, I want to talk to you about native species management and enhancement, specifically the platypus, because obviously we have had a fair bit of adverse publicity recently on the television. In the MPS on page 1-6 mention is made of native species maintenance and enhancement as a method of protecting our natural and cultural heritage. Can you give an example of how this is being applied to protect and recover our most threatened species. In particular, can the

minister inform the committee of the conservation status of the platypus given the recent and ongoing controversy surrounding them at Maleny?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: It is not in my electorate, but I have had a number of concerns raised by my constituents.

Ms BOYLE: People are really concerned. There is no doubt that you would say that, whilst maybe not first or second on the list, the platypus is one of Australia's iconic species. It is not, however, one of our threatened species. That is some misinformation that those at Maleny are putting about at this time, whether in ignorance or for other purposes. I am well aware, of course, that a significant number of residents at Maleny have not wanted the development to proceed for several years now and have been searching for ways of stopping the development of the supermarket. It is only recently, however, that they thought that the platypus might be their answer, as it were, to stopping a development that they did not wish to proceed.

When I received the request from those protesters that maybe the development should be stopped and that an interim conservation order should be taken out under the Nature Conservation Act, I, of course, seriously investigated the situation. My information is that the platypus is a protected species listed in the 'least concern' category under the Nature Conservation Act. It is not a threatened species.

The 2001 NatureSearch-led platypus survey of Queensland revealed that the species is widely distributed in the state's waterways, occurring—surprises here—as far north as Cooktown, south to the New South Wales border and west to Goondiwindi. The survey results report apparent high numbers thriving in the creek systems of Brisbane's inner suburbs. For that we should really be very pleased—that despite the tremendous development in Queensland our platypuses are surviving and surviving well. Nonetheless, might I let you know that as a protected species directly killing or injuring a platypus attracts a penalty of some \$225,000 or two years imprisonment. Platypuses are highly mobile. They have a large network of underground burrows using up quite large areas.

We have worked with the developer on that particular site and have from him, cooperatively rather than by order, some particular extra measures that will take place during excavation and construction to ensure that no platypuses on site are harmed, so far as that is humanly possible. These include, would you mind, excavating by hand to below burrow depth for any excavation work in the vicinity of platypus burrows; employing pipe cameras to inspect any burrows which may be uncovered for resident platypus; and engaging an EPA licensed spotter/catcher to respond to a circumstance of a platypus being at risk if leaving a burrow. There will be an external platypus expert on site at all times.

Mr HOOLIHAN: In relation to the previous Beattie government promise to employ 140 new rangers, what are the current staff levels and could you give examples of the type of work carried out by agency staff?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you, indeed, for the question. I will get to the numbers in a moment. Might I tell you that one of the great pleasures of being the environment minister is travelling around the state to some of our very special protected areas and meeting with a lot of our staff, including our rangers, some of them in very isolated areas. I wonder whether people know what an amazing and diverse range of people we have working away in some very difficult spots around the state and doing an excellent job, not only in their core business, as it were, of dealing with pests and weeds and making sure their protected area estate is properly managed, but also in dealing with tourists and working more closely, these days, with councils.

So far as ranger numbers are concerned, we added 140 permanent rangers to assist in better managing national parks in the last term of government, bringing the total number of permanent rangers to approximately 612. These numbers have been maintained in this term, although they do vary slightly due to normal staff movements and recruitment action. Over this next year we will be increasing the number of rangers by some 56. I will ask Alan Feely to address this issue in a moment.

I am particularly conscious of the increase in staff in Cape York, for example. There will be an extra six positions for rangers up there—at least a couple of which will be filled by Indigenous people. On top of that there will be five additional trainee positions.

Mr Feely: There are an additional 56 rangers coming on stream next year as part of the western hardwoods project. Some will go to Cape York. I will outline the task they undertake. They do a number of things including fire management, weed and pest control and normal conservation management. As the minister said, a substantial amount of time goes into providing tourism and visitor opportunities to the people of Queensland and the tourists who come here.

We are very aware of the importance of rangers to the park service. They are our critical resource in undertaking the management that we do. We go to significant lengths to ensure that they work in good conditions. We have put a lot of energy into new ranger housing in the last two to three years. By the time we finish in Cape York, there will be approximately 30 new houses for the staff. Substantial funding has gone into some of the existing houses to bring them up to an appropriate standard.

We have an extensive training program, including some on-site IT training. We have gone into partnership with the university. University students accompany our staff and give the remote staff one-on-one training in utilising IT whether it be simple emailing right through to the GIS type systems we use to control or manage our performance. We put a lot of energy into looking after rangers and we will continue to do so.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Given the role of the EPA in ensuring the protection and enhancement of Queensland's natural and cultural assets, can you advise the committee on how the EPA practices what it preaches?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. The old saying is that you are so busy looking after other people that you often do not perform yourself. My father was an electrician and the element in the jug was always going bust and there was never a spare one at home to fix it.

Using the same principle, it is appropriate for the EPA to have a look at its own performance in terms of energy and water usage. Along these lines, therefore, under the output performance statement the EPA has set itself a goal to minimise negative environmental impacts and the waste of natural capital. It will do so actively through implementing environmental sustainability initiatives and improved management.

So far as its own achievements are concerned, in this regard I am pleased to say that in 2004-05 the EPA achieved the following. The EPA's levels of recycling increased by approximately 12.7 per cent per employee compared to 2003-04. This was mostly due to increased awareness and access to recycling services. That is a lesson for all of us around the state who are concerned about this topic. Another of its achievements is that office paper recycling increased from 50 kilograms per employee to 59.2 kilograms. That is a further increase in recycling of 18.4 per cent. Commingling recycling rates remained the same at 6.2 kilograms per employee per annum. The total tonnage of cardboard recycled was 29.3 tonnes. General waste in the EPA has reduced from 31.5 kilograms per employee to 29.2 kilograms—a 7.3 per cent reduction. Recyclable material being disposed of as general waste has reduced from 38 per cent. In 2005-06, \$26,000 in energy savings will be achieved by implementing recommendations of energy audits conducted at nine EPA regional centres. Works will cost about \$113,000 and provide a return on investment in less than five years.

I thought that I should bring it a bit closer to home so I invited some of the EPA's experts to inspect my ministerial office and comment on how we, too, could improve our act in terms of water usage and energy usage. They had a bit of a tour and checked out my dual-flushing toilets. They looked at the lights and put together a plan for how we can achieve improvements in energy and water usage and waste management. We are hoping to set some benchmarks within the EPA that other government departments might like to copy and achieve themselves.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, on page 11 of the MPS there is reference to ongoing monitoring of immediate sea levels. Is this the same monitoring that detected the Boxing Day tsunami? What other information can be gathered from this source to better prepare and warn us of coastal storm events?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the important question. It is probably not one that is on other people's minds other than at the time of such a tragedy as the Boxing Day tsunami. The reason it should be on our minds is that climate change is no longer the speculation of so-called extreme greens. It is a fact. We know it to be so. It is now more widely understood or at least there is wider awareness and public interest. With that is going to come some other changes to our climate other than simply temperature changes. In some areas, like the northern part of Queensland, we are likely to have wilder and more dreadful storms and changes also in the ocean.

The EPA, through a network of storm tide gauges, actually recorded the 2004 Boxing Day tsunami one day later, on 27 December, at sites along the Queensland coastline after the wave had past not down directly to us but around Australia's southern coastline and then moved northwards. By this time the tsunami height had reduced to less than half a metre and was no longer capable of affecting Queenslanders who live near the coast. The EPA's coastal network primarily collects data related to storm tides and waves but is also capable of recording normal tides and wave set-up and phenomena such as tsunamis and other long-wave oceanographic disturbances. Tropical cyclones are part of our regular business.

When we consider that the monitoring of extreme water levels due to severe weather events has been ongoing for only 35 years then we know that we do not truly understand the broader perspective of 100 years of impacts on our coastal environment. Nonetheless, we are fortunate as a sophisticated country to have these storm tide monitoring devices in place.

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

Mr WELLINGTON: I start by congratulating the minister on not having all the rows of seats full of public servants. It is good to see a minimum number of public servants here to support you in answering the difficult questions that we put to you. Following on from the answer to your last question, how are you proposing to inform and prepare Queenslanders who live or work in our coastal low-lying areas to cope with the possible storm and tidal inundation events? I am led to believe that many property owners

living in these areas may not have insurance cover to cover this type of event. What are you actually doing to inform and prepare Queenslanders?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. This is the beginning to a program that will surely need to go on for many years. There is tremendous resistance, when it comes to a piece of land that is your own, to recognising that maybe it was a bad planning decision in the first place that you were permitted to build on that land. There are, from time to time, developments on some of our islands or in our tourism areas along the coast where erosion is already occurring. Far from accepting the explanation of when you look at 50 years of history of that coastline the erosion processes are normal and, in fact, you are attempting to hold back nature and that in the end you will never be successful is not really good news or acceptable news. So many of the people associated with our coastal processes are having a hard time getting the message out there.

The things that we are doing at the moment come under a few headings—in particular, the Queensland Greenhouse Strategy. This was released by the Queensland government in May last year. It is a strategy to work across government signalling the importance of sustainability for the long term. I have mentioned earlier in this committee examination the sustainable housing discussion paper and the actions that we are taking there.

Another project that we have is the ecosciences project which is about the establishment of an ecosciences precinct at the old Boggo Road jail site. This precinct will provide an opportunity to combine the research skills of government agencies with the colocation of some 1,000 staff who are at the forefront of climate change and sustainability research and who will help better manage our natural resources and understand what action we can indeed take as climate change becomes more real.

We need a commitment from others to work with us on all of the coastal plans that we have in place. As a government we have made a commitment to have the full Queensland coastline under coastal management plans by 2010. These coastal management plans are elaborate, you might say, detailed plans that take some time to develop and involve a lot of public consultation—particularly consultation with developers and councils. We have to develop more localised plans for how storm surge can be managed and how buildings at least in the future can be set back from the coastal zone and can be less at risk from the impact of erosion than those buildings already built. We have seen this with the recent high-rainfall event on the Gold Coast.

Mr WELLINGTON: At page 1-14 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement you refer to the Environmental Protection Authority aim of ensuring that our environment is safe and livable and that there are acceptable levels of noise. What priorities have you placed on the introduction of new Queensland environmental nuisance laws regulating the riding of recreational, noisy trail bikes on private and public land?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. As a former local government councillor yourself, as I was, you know well how noise nuisance can severely aggravate residents in different areas. Probably the most common complaints that I get in Cairns are not so much about trail bikes, which by and large is a police matter, but more entertainment venues, clubs and the like, belting out noise from a band. The noise travels on the wind down the hill when residents are trying to sleep. There have been some reports to me about trail bike noise and these have more properly been referred on to the police. It is a matter for them.

Dr FLEGG: My question relates to development applications that require the approval of the EPA. I understand that there is a 20-day period for processing applications and under circumstances a 10-day extension for that. I have had a number of complaints, some of them quite dramatic, of it taking up to seven months to get approval. This is a huge cost to developers. Some of them have been confronted with the issue that on the expiry of the 30 days they are required, even if it is just because of inaction on the part of your department, to reapply and start the process again. I have one such case in front of me, but we have taken this up with your department. I would like to know what proportion of the development applications that go to the EPA are processed and finalised within the 20-day period without any need for them to reinitiate or modify. What proportion are completed within that 20 days?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is an important one. The EPA is a good fall guy sometimes with the complaints that have been brought to me as local government minister about any state agency not making the time frames of the IPA legislation as a concurrence or a referral agency, and I have been keen to take that up. We cannot expect local governments to perform if we do not perform ourselves, and the EPA is the department that has most often been accused of dragging the chain. My investigations on the particular matters have shown that that is not in fact always so and that it is not because their file is sitting on somebody's desk not being looked at.

The problems we have had with keeping to time—and that is for other state departments as well as my own, and for local councils—are largely about the rush of development and the complexity of developments in south-east Queensland. Council planners often caught in the spotlight as it were are inclined to say, 'It's the state government,' and sometimes indeed it is not. In fairness to council planners, it was instructive for me to notice this morning in a briefing I was reading that there are 400 or so development applications processed by the Gold Coast City Council every month. When you have

such a pressure of development on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane and in the Sunshine Coast councils and in the other growing areas like Mackay, Hervey Bay, Townsville and Cairns and you have a national shortage of planners, then of course there are going to be delays in the system.

I understand the developer's absolute frustration with that and have been pleased therefore to begin trialling a new system, particularly with the EPA, towards making for speedier and clearer and quicker decisions with regard to development applications. We are presently calling it predesign conferencing on the basis that, as soon as a builder, a developer or industry for that matter get their eye on a block of land and have a concept for what they want to do, they should come in to see us in advance of spending millions of dollars on designs and going through a rigid system. They should talk to us as the EPA and hear from us what legislation there might be that might be troublesome for them or get the tick on the parts of the development that should be no trouble and talk to us about how they might best design water on site.

Dr FLEGG: Would you be able to get back to me with the percentage that are actually done in—

Ms BOYLE: I thank you for the reminder. I am keen to address any delays that there have been. I will ask the director-general to respond briefly on that, but otherwise we can provide you with a detailed number at a later time.

Mr Purtill: Bruce, we will get back to you in this session. I have just sent a message for that. We have an Ecoaccess system that monitors our on-time delivery performance, and we will get those specifics for you in this session.

Dr FLEGG: Thank you.

Mr WELLINGTON: Minister, I refer you to your answer to my question on notice No. 573 and ask: why do you not propose to doze or grade any existing firebreaks or roads in the Mapleton forest during this year?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. I will ask Mr Feely to address that.

Mr Feely: We have a substantial fire management program every year and people make application for a number of works to do. When we go through we assess that with regard to the various priorities. We put firebreaks at the top of the list. We did something like 2,000 kilometres of firebreaks statewide last year. In the last three years we have done planned burns across 1.7 million hectares. In this fire year we have a planned burn program again of 0.78 million hectares right across Queensland. The burns are scheduled over the winter months because it is obviously a lot safer to do it then. We have \$0.5 million included in 2005-06 for our fire management budget—an additional \$0.5 million—taking it to a total of \$5.5 million. We have \$0.95 million spread across 82 specific projects to enable priority firebreak works and major hazard reduction burning.

With regard to Mapleton State Forest, we have done substantial works there in the last year or two with regard to firebreaks. We have also done substantial mitigation works there from my understanding. I thought we gave the answer as to what we had historically done in the question on notice. We do not need to do firebreaks in any one place every year as long as we keep them well enough maintained so that they are suitable for a firebreak. They do not have to be graded every single year to do that. It is just a matter of providing safe access for the staff to enable us to burn back off them, which we do. I think 2,000 kilometres in a year in anyone's book is a huge amount of firebreak maintenance, and we have an ongoing commitment to do that. It is a No. 1 priority for us both from a neighbour safety perspective and also from a conservation management perspective.

We are also spending an extra \$300,000 in the coming year with regard to newly designed vehicle mounted fire units to better update our capacity to manage fire, and we are always trying to improve that. We have a huge amount of ongoing pre-emptive work with regard to readiness. This year we are upgrading 1,500 kilometres of firebreak across the state both on parks and forests as they would have done to just under 2,000 kilometres last year. We have over 500 field staff trained in fire management. We ensure that all of our staff who attend a fire are trained to basic firefighter level 1 as a minimum and are appropriately equipped to undertake the task. We have a very close liaison with the bushfire management agencies in Queensland and also across Australia. We regularly meet with other fire management agencies.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer to page 1-12 of the MPS. With our population increases, do you think that the reduced demand for camping in protected areas is because the people are disappointed with your government's decision to run down parks and because many parks are closed due to lack of maintenance?

Ms BOYLE: I wonder if you have been out there with all of the people lately.

Mr RICKUSS: It says here that you are reducing numbers.

Ms BOYLE: The figures in terms of our visitation being down this year are minimally down and we really think that that is about miserable weather over Easter and the Anzac Day long weekends. They are of course two of our peak visitation periods in Queensland. The numbers in most areas are going up. In fact, because of that and because of some frustration in our most popular spots, particularly

at school holiday time or over the Christmas/January period, we have moved to establish an online booking system to make it easier for people to reserve their favourite spot and have some certainty that they can have that spot before they take the long drive to get there.

Nonetheless, with moving to that system and attempting to balance out all of the spots that there are at the busy times, we have done some surveys on satisfaction for those who attend our parks and you have clearly been speaking to somebody in the 10 per cent. Some 90 per cent report very high levels of satisfaction. What we are also doing—

Mr RICKUSS: The numbers are a bit indicative though, Minister.

Ms BOYLE: The numbers are showing a four per cent to five per cent drop between 1999 and 2003, although we are not sure how real this is. It is very hard of course to be sure in some of our isolated areas how many people are there. Fraser Island is down a bit this year; there is no doubt about that. We have been increasing our facilities and expanding them and increasing our parks. Maybe they are spread further. Our online booking is certainly working pretty well in most areas of the state and we are not concerned about the reports through the surveys of the satisfaction of people with our parks.

What we are asking them to do in areas where they do see anything that they think should be better managed is to take time to call us and to talk to one of our rangers to let us know. Sometimes we get reports of rave parties in camping areas and probably some hooning that goes on in there and those who leave dreadful rubbish behind and it can be park staff who are blamed for the mess as though we are not looking after the park areas. All of that goes to say that we have more rangers, more parks and a high level of satisfaction. Hopefully if the weather is good, the figures will go in the other direction as this next year goes on.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer to page 1-14 of the MPS. I refer to the recent incident report in the media of a five-year-old child receiving three needlestick injuries in a playground at Logan Primary. Minister, do you concede that, despite having regulations in force for five years now, your department has failed to prosecute a single person for discarding a syringe?

CHAIR: That has nothing to do with the budget.

Mr RICKUSS: But it is ensuring a clean environment. It is on page 1-14 of the—

CHAIR: We will move on.

Mr RICKUSS: It is on page 1-14 here.

CHAIR: Move on.

Mr RICKUSS: Okay. I refer to non-government question on notice No. 1 and refer particularly to the audit conducted by the EPA's green purchasing program, the emphasis being as to whether the agency walks the talk. Minister, can you please advise the committee how many of your executive officers drive hybrid cars or ethanol gas or gas cars?

Ms BOYLE: I will ask the department to do that in a moment. I have to say that I have only ridden in one in my time so far, and that was for one of our regional managers in the Rockhampton area. I was hearing from him what an excellent car it is. I will ask the director-general to address that.

Mr Purtill: The EPA has the second largest fleet of hybrid vehicles. But if you are talking about the senior executive one—

Ms BOYLE: The second largest fleet for?

Mr Purtill: The second largest fleet of hybrid vehicles in the Queensland government. We have the vast majority of our vehicles transferred over to either four cylinder or hybrid vehicles. Most of the hybrid vehicles that we have are the Toyota Prius vehicle as far as I am aware, both the old and the newer model. We use those for all of our typical office work, but we also have a significant fleet of four-wheel drives, as you can imagine, being responsible for 11 million hectares of national park and forests. But where we can, we have moved towards those vehicles when they suit the type of business that we are doing, which is largely the office orientated type work.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer to page 1-6 of the MPS, 'Output: Protecting our Natural and Cultural Heritage'. What amount of money has been allocated in this budget for the initial upgrading and ongoing maintenance of your trail networks—that is, riding trails that are not actually a draft as you referred to before?

Ms BOYLE: The \$650,000 that has been allocated for the whole project is through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, so I do not have—

Mr RICKUSS: Is that for the ongoing maintenance, too, Minister?

Ms BOYLE: So far as maintenance of the trails, once they are designated as trails, I will ask Mr Feely to address that.

Mr Feely: Over the last three years we have been developing a strategic asset management system which lists all of our assets including horse riding trails as well as other things like Great Walks and our various visitor facilities. We have all of those now firmly established on a computer system which tracks the maintenance requirement for them. The frequency and the horse riding trails will be

added to that. We have had substantial injections of additional maintenance money of \$8.5 million over the three years coming—last year, this year and next year—plus we have the \$58 million initiative that has just recently been announced. All of that will enable us to ensure that we keep the maintenance at the level we should. Those horse riding tracks will be prioritised along with everything else, but they will be appropriately maintained well into the future.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer to page 1-6 of the MPS relating to protecting our natural and cultural heritage. I understand that the former regional landscape land of Mount Barney was purchased to provide public access to recreational land and to alleviate the pressure on the adjoining Mount Barney National Park. Do you concede that converting the RLL land to national park is against the initial principles for which it was purchased as it is used as a cattle paddock still, and I will table a photo of a bit of the land?

Leave granted.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. Are you able to address this, Mr Feely?

Mr Feely: I assume that you are talking about Glenrock, by the way, so the very high conservation value—

Mr RICKUSS: Mount Barney.

Mr Feely: Mount Barney? Sorry. I misunderstood you. I thought you were talking about—

Mr RICKUSS: It is Mount Barney. That is a bit of land that was purchased under Goss originally—regional open landscapes or something. It was a cattle paddock and that is a big scat there from a yowie, I would say.

CHAIR: Are you answering this question yourself?

Mr RICKUSS: No, and that is the cow paddock to show it is a cow paddock, and it is going to go back to national parks.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for that. I will ask Mr Purtill to speak to it.

Mr Purtill: That property has been incorporated, but I think it is still consistent with the intent for public access to open space, scenic amenity values and regional landscape values. So I think that those areas are consistent. Becoming part of our national park estate, particularly in the Mount Barney area, will provide a very effective buffer to, particularly, the high-value areas. You obviously are very familiar with that area as well. It is a great area, particularly once you get up on the forested hill slopes, so it does provide that significant boost. It is consistent with the new South East Queensland Regional Plan that is being put into place to make sure that there are designated landscape areas in that balance of 80 per cent that has not been designated for urban development as we go along.

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

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, you talk about national parks. One really pleasing aspect of national parks in my electorate particularly was the further extension of the Byfield National Park under this government, for which many of the people in my area and I thank you and for the work undertaken by your predecessor. My question, though, does not relate to national parks. It relates to the pesticide chemical chlorpyrifos. This has been implicated in fish kills in Queensland. What action has been taken to ensure concerns about this chemical and its environmental impacts are being appropriately addressed?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. This chemical, chlorpyrifos, was brought to my attention only several months ago when in the Maroochy area we had a fish kill in a creek and were looking for the cause of it. As I investigated further I discovered that there is quite a serious story to tell. Chlorpyrifos is a broad-spectrum organophosphorus pesticide. About 160 products containing chlorpyrifos are registered in Australia. It is most widely used, of course, in agriculture to control a range of insect pests across many crops, including cotton, sugar cane, vegetables, stone fruit, turf and ornamental crops. It is sometimes used in homes and on commercial sites, where it is registered for the control of pests such as cockroaches, termites and fleas.

I had heard, however, that the United States had become alarmed about the use of chlorpyrifos—they had put in very tight controls and, in fact, banned it from some uses—and so I investigated further. In Queensland it is the only chemical registered for use on citrus, mangoes, avocados and bananas to control a range of pests. So I was really aware that our agricultural industry is dependent on it. Nonetheless, the truth is that it is highly toxic to fish, aquatic arthropods, oysters and algae. It can have a toxic effect on freshwater and marine fish at a level of two to three micrograms per litre. So, no wonder we have had too many reports of fish kills associated with chlorpyrifos—we suspect, as many as five over the past three years, including the incident that I referred to in Coolum Creek.

I have reported it through the environment ministers' national committee and asked for other environment ministers to let me know if they are having problems in their states but also would have the committee note that we are asking the Commonwealth, through the National Health and Medical

Research Council, to review chlorpyrifos and whether our present standards and limitations on its use are sufficient. I recognise that that would be a very serious decision indeed and impact on our agricultural industry and yet, at the same time, we just have to find, and surely will find, better solutions than chemicals that can cause such harm to the environment.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Thank you, Minister. Further, in relation to the Environmental Protection Act, relating to the review of roles and responsibilities under that act, could you explain what consideration is being given to how it will affect local governments?

Ms BOYLE: This project of looking at the roles and responsibilities and the delegations from the Environmental Protection Agency through the EPA Act to local government is a joint job, as it were. I dare say honourable members are aware that, from time to time, local governments feel fairly put upon by the state and Commonwealth governments. They complain of cost-shifting and of our shifting responsibilities to them that have previously been ours. There may well be some truth in that on some occasions, but a lot of times it is a call by the community for better and more thorough—more extensive—responses to community problems that leads to increased responsibilities.

This program, therefore, which is jointly being managed by the EPA and the Local Government Association of Queensland is established to review all of the responsibilities and look to the future. So far as we have got yet, we have designated the principles and we have indicated the main areas to be reviewed. These include the regulation of nuisance, such as noise nuisance; soil and sediment management; clean-up and cost recovery; and enforcement. What our review to date has highlighted is the need for more appropriate division of responsibilities between the EPA and local governments and to recognise with this division that there is proper and appropriate financial and staff resourcing for the responsible level of government. This also goes towards ensuring that there is not unnecessary overlap or duplication that results in inefficiency in the systems.

The LGAQ and the state government have jointly endorsed all 17 principles. Principle 1 is being implemented by development of a means for assessing how intended changes can be of benefit to both the EPA and local governments. Initial consultation is past—from the end of last year—and the consultation has widened earlier this year. District environmental protection groups comprising managers and staff from the EPA and local governments have been established to facilitate better regional and district cooperation. The broad stakeholder consultation on the complete package is proposed to commence from August of this year and last three months. We look forward to meeting with mayors, of course, during this period. The environment conference that has just been held in Gladstone is also a part of that program. We are looking for a joint way forward. Hopefully that will be clear by the end of the year, and any necessary changes in legislation or practice can be put into place early in 2006.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Thank you, Minister.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, it is only fitting that I ask you a question on the *HMAS Brisbane* project because I recently wrote you a letter asking you to grant the Bribie Island RSL sub-branch their request asking for a small piece of souvenir value of *HMAS Brisbane*. I think that they will be delighted with your reply. With regard to that, I note that on page 1-9 of the MPS it mentions the expenditure variations that occur due to the *HMAS Brisbane* project. Can you inform the committee what benefits this project will bring to the state?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I am pleased indeed to do so. This is a project that has attracted quite widespread attention. As the time comes for it to be scuttled and to become in fact an artificial reef I have no doubt that the interest will increase not only from Sunshine Coast locals, as it might be, but from others around Queensland and even from tourists from overseas. The *HMAS Brisbane* artificial reef project presents significant tourism, economic and industry development opportunities for Queensland and the Sunshine Coast and it will strengthen the Sunshine Coast as a tourist destination. That will mean better opportunities for business and industry and for community development.

One of the interesting figures that I can give you is that over 95 per cent of the project works required to establish the reef is being undertaken by local Queensland companies. What that has meant is an injection of \$5 million into the local economy and that means lots of jobs. It is anticipated, of course, that the scuttling of *HMAS Brisbane* will occur in July/August and that the conservation park that will come with it will be declared at the same time.

The reef has been recognised already internationally as offering outstanding dive tourism opportunities and I am pleased to say that only this week I was able to announce that four dive operators will be offered the opportunity to conduct commercial dive activities at the new artificial reef. We had previously called for expressions of interest and a joint committee of private sector tourism and government interests, environmental as well as from the tourism and employment point of view, had acted as a panel. The four dive operators who will have these opportunities are the Mooloolo based Sunreef Scuba Diving Services, Scuba World, Noosa Blue Water Dive and a Sydney company, Heli Dive. As we get closer, of course, to the day when they can get to work it is timely to have these operators in place.

There will be a benefit, of course. User fees will cover the development and ongoing management of the reef. So, while there has been a considerable infrastructure cost, you might say, in readying the *HMAS Brisbane* to become an artificial reef, it will more than pay its way in recurrent fees, and also in the attraction of tourists to the Sunshine Coast—not only from the fees that they will pay to dive around that site but, of course, all of the nights of accommodation and the ancillary trips they will take in the area. They will more than benefit Queensland when they return home and talk about this exciting dive.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, in relation to the new tourism in protected areas initiative, how will that result in fair outcomes for the tourism industry, the community and the environment and what consultation has there been in the development of the initiative?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. This is an initiative, of course, for which I should give good recognition to previous ministers, both Mickel and Wells. It is one that I am keen to see reach more of a conclusion, as it were, or have more results. It will not ever conclude because it is really, in the end, about a relationship between the Environmental Protection Agency and tourism interests. It is a recognition that our protected areas substantially are there for people to enjoy and that the people who will enjoy them are not only locals but, in fact, tourists from elsewhere in Queensland, interstate or even internationally.

It could well be said that in times past, the relationship between the tourism industry and environment has not been as close as it could be. I am pleased to say that through our tourism in protected areas project lots of exciting initiatives are occurring. The intention, of course, is that we recognise that while it costs the Queensland government considerable monies to establish parks, manage them, look after them and staff them, the beneficiaries, often, are those from out of state who do not pay our local kinds of costs or, again, international tourists who do not even pay taxes in Australia.

It is reasonable for us to look for a way that tourism can be optimised without damaging our environment while yet providing properly the contribution that it can in protected areas. This program, therefore, is really flexible to allow for the particular area under discussion to be a matter for lateral thinking in terms of the establishment potentially of such things as joint infrastructure between private tourism operators and the Queensland government. I am aware, for example, that in an area like the Daintree, not too far north of my own electorate, the tourism operators are particularly pleased to be invited in, to look at ways in which, while we might manage the protected areas, they can know the extra initiatives, our capital works planning and staff availability, so that on adjoining lands—private sector, freehold lands—they can put in matching operations so that they can work in partnership with us. In a sense, tourism in protected areas is about those partnerships.

There has been some nervousness in the tourism industry, though I believe that that is settling now for the land based industry as we begin consultations with marine park tourism operators. The marine operators are nervous, maybe because of the history of the EPA, that this may not be productive for them and beneficial, but I have no doubt that time will prove that it will lead to a beneficial partnership in the islands and in the marine environment as much as it has on land.

CHAIR: The committee will adjourn for 15 minutes. The hearing will resume at 5.15 pm to continue the examination of the portfolios—

Ms BOYLE: Mr Chair, I am pleased to leave behind some promotional materials and offer them to members of the committee for their hard work this evening—a Great Walks hat, a dignified tie to recognise your support for national parks and a scarf for the ladies. We would be pleased to have you promote our magnificent national parks should you choose to avail yourself of this small consideration.

CHAIR: Thank you very much, Minister. I will continue, now—the examination of the portfolios of Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women.

Proceedings suspended from 4.59 pm to 5.16 pm.

CHAIR: Before we resume questioning, I invite the minister to make a few comments about questions raised earlier.

Ms BOYLE: For a question that we had not answered completely in the previous session I now have information to hand which I would be pleased to read into the record. On-time delivery for development approvals from the EPA's database for the financial year 31 May 2005 was 89 per cent. The Integrated Planning Act 1997 provides for extensions of time for the assessment of applications. Generally, the only reason the EPA would want to extend is where inadequate information has been provided, and applicants normally agree to this rather than risk refusal of their application because they have provided inadequate supporting information. To help applicants provide the information necessary, I have introduced the predesigned conferencing service I spoke about earlier.

CHAIR: I call the member for Lockyer.

Mr RICKUSS: Minister, I refer to the output on pages 2-26 and 2-27 of the MPS 'Policy Coordination and Services for Queensland Women'. In May 2004 you launched an online database for abused women across the state to find out the local contact details that abused women can go to for

help against domestic violence. How has this initiative assisted Indigenous women in remote communities in their fight against domestic violence and what have you done as minister for women to implement the genuine, practical initiatives outlined in the Indigenous Women's Task Force on Violence, chaired by Boni Robertson?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that very important question. It is one of the sad stories of our time that here we are 100 years after women in Queensland got the vote—and their campaigns for the vote for fuller participation in society were about a numbers of issues including domestic violence—and we still have not resolved this problem. We still have women who are not safe in their own homes. The web site to which you refer was a strategy to target particularly women in rural and remote areas. We are aware, however, that that does not reach many women in Indigenous communities where computer usage is still at a lower percentage than it is in other communities around Queensland. That means, therefore, that our initiatives have been substantially face to face with women in the Aboriginal communities.

I am pleased to report to honourable members that Aboriginal women, particularly in the cape communities that I have visited, have decided that their silence will be no more, that for too many generations they have not spoken up. In most of the communities there is a developed women's group, which in various ways communicates with me and the Office for Women on a regular basis. They believe that working through their community justice group within their local communities is another way.

Additionally, some of the councils have worked with these groups to provide safe houses, not so much for the women themselves—refuges as we might know them—but for men who are inebriated and who are in a state whereby they might be likely to go home and behave violently. This has been found to be particularly successful on Thursday Island, where it is the men who have some time out. In some of the communities in the northern peninsula area they have created out-stations that are havens, protected places, where men can go for a time to restore their confidence and good sense before returning to their communities and to their families.

Mr RICKUSS: Again, referring to pages 2-26 and 2-27 of the MPS, Dr Cherrell Hirst recently provided the health minister with the *Report of the Review of Maternity Services in Queensland*. The report revealed that some 36 hospitals had lost their respective maternity services, despite Queensland women clearly wanting to have their babies within their local communities. What action have you taken as the minister responsible for women to ensure that women will be heard on this issue and that maternity services will be returned to Queensland public hospitals to enhance women's choice, wherever they live?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a very big issue, particularly for younger women in our broader Queensland community. Mostly this is a matter for the leadership of the Minister for Health. So the actions taken by the Office for Women and by me directly have been to support him in the seriousness and extent of the review and to ensure easy communication through the Office for Women with women who have discussed these issues with us or who have put their perspective to us. In fact, only a couple of weeks ago in Cairns I consulted with a number of people representing a group of women who regard this as a very serious matter and wished to discuss it further.

The point that they were wishing to make—and it was absolutely clear to me, to the Minister for Health and to the Queensland government—is that they do not want this review that the minister has undertaken to now gather dust on the shelves. They want it to be implemented. But they recognise, nonetheless, that it is a very difficult balance between providing the opportunity for women to give birth in their own communities and ensuring that they have a proper, high standard of care that is expected in the year 2005, recognising that obstetricians and gynaecologists, in particular, are very concerned about public liability—about anything going wrong and any potential legal consequences.

The outcome is that these women are putting a proposal to me that runs right through the review of birthing services in significant country towns such as Mareeba, which is not far from Cairns—but still not in the really remote communities. The proposal is for a maternity service with midwives and, so long as the woman has no particular risk factors that would alert her carers during a pregnancy to needing a major centre with more intensive care and higher levels of expertise either for the birth itself or for the care of the child afterwards, this would be their preferred model. I have taken up that issue and will continue to talk further with the Minister for Health about it, but it is a matter for him in the end to decide and on which to lead.

Mr MALONE: Minister, the third last dot point on page 2-22 of the MPS refers to the department's commitment to educate owners of the need to comply with and encourage councils to enforce Queensland swimming pool laws. Minister, last year you indicated to the committee that \$150,000 had previously gone towards a media campaign. What level of funding is budgeted for 2005-06 for a public education awareness campaign to ensure increased compliance with swimming pool safety laws in Queensland?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is a matter that may not concern us quite so much at this climatic time of the year but will again, of course, as the later months of this year become warmer and we know that families will be more active in their swimming pools around Queensland. The

campaign that had been quite costly and that was previously run was, of course, to introduce the new standards of pool fencing legislation that had been brought in by the Queensland parliament at that time. Because we were requiring improved tighter standards, we believed it was necessary to spend some considerable money on that campaign, which has since ended.

We have instead focused more on councils and their inspectorial processes and have reported to you in answers to questions on notice as well as more widely to the public on how councils are progressing with routine swimming pool inspections. I must pay a compliment to some of the councils in south-east Queensland that have taken up this responsibility enthusiastically. Amongst these councils are Brisbane, the Gold Coast, Noosa and Logan and, in the regional areas, Cairns and Townsville.

So far as the numbers of inspections that are carried out are concerned, it depends on the individual council's particular program. There are some councils that advertise through local means that an inspector is available on request and will only respond if they receive a complaint. There are others that are more active in terms of advertising in certain suburbs—for example, they will be out and about, knocking on doors and asking to inspect on the spot the pool fencing to ensure compliance.

It is interesting nonetheless that, while there has been a considerable number of on-the-spot fines handed out, the number of breaches that have been found come back primarily to mistakes with people propping open gates and not ensuring that latches are working properly. So far as moneys for this particular year are concerned, I will ask the director-general to address that element of the question.

Dr Campbell: There is \$65,000 left over in the current program and that will include some media campaign advertising.

Mr MALONE: At the estimates hearing last year you indicated that there was a greater need to assist councils to do the job in that area so that the councils would have the knowledge and capacity to enforce the laws. What level of funding was allocated by your department in 2004-05 for the training of council officers and what level of funding has been budgeted for 2005-06?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. Before I ask the director-general to address it, might I say to you that Building Codes Queensland, which is the section of the department of local government and planning under which these services comes, is constantly providing training and it may well be difficult to separate the training provided to inspectorial staff through Building Codes Queensland for swimming pools as distinct from other inspectorial services and duties. You would be aware that this year we have placed a high emphasis on fire safety inspections in budget accommodation, and that has certainly been our priority in this last six months and most particularly in this last three months leading up to 30 June, when stage 2 compliance was required for budget accommodation buildings around Queensland. Would you like to add to that, Dr Campbell?

Dr Campbell: The department does not specifically provide funding to train council inspectors. We do maintain the standards, we do respond to inquiries from council inspectors, and we do issue technical flashes to them. The \$65,000 that I mentioned earlier that was carried over from the previous program does include some training on guidelines, but it has not been specifically spent on training people at this stage.

Ms BOYLE: There is, however, a consultant working for the department at the moment having a look at the kinds of training programs that may be beneficial. We are undertaking to review some of the anomalies in the pool-fencing legislation in cooperation with the surveillance unit that has worked on the issue of child drownings through the Health Department. Within that, we are recognising that it may well be that additional training programs should be provided, whether by the department directly or the LGAQ or even the inspectorial services staff. I will be pleased to keep you abreast of that development as the year proceeds.

Mr MALONE: Minister, we do not want to deal with the swimming pool issue lightly. It is a very important issue. A lot of young people drown in swimming pools that are not properly protected. I understand the legislation indicates that councils should do random checks on swimming pools, and that was part of the role that they took on board. There seems to have been a change somewhere along the track where councils are doing other inspections rather than random inspections of swimming pools. Were you consulted when some councils basically changed the rules in terms of reporting swimming pool breaches? Were you actually involved in that discussion? Are you making some moves to rectify that situation in terms of reporting back to you the number of breaches in swimming pool misadventures?

Ms BOYLE: I have to say that we have some resistance from councils on these matters in general. As you are aware, we have a proudly independent system of local government in Queensland, and there is some resistance to too much direction of their activities by the state. There is, therefore, the culture in general, as well as related to swimming pool inspections, that we know our area best and we know best, therefore, how to conduct a proper compliance program within our area. I have been reluctant to force a standardised, exact compliance program on all councils, keeping in mind that councils that have a high proportion of swimming pools are a majority of the local governments in Queensland.

The other complaint that is sometimes received by the department from local governments is the number of surveys and statistics that they are constantly having to provide to us, so they say. Therefore, we have developed the pro forma over this last year of routine questions that are asked of local government councils in relation to inspections. We have, I am pleased to say, had a good response from those targeted local authorities.

Given that we do not have reliable numbers on exactly how many pools there are in the Mackay Shire Council or Cairns and that you would have to work out the compliance rate according to the population, the number of pools and the number of inspections, in the end the point is: are we stopping toddlers in particular from drowning in pools? The good news is that the figures, as compared to 2000 and 2001, have halved. That still means, according to my last knowledge, some five toddlers having drowned in Queensland in a season. But five is still too many.

We should keep our focus on the big picture, which is really getting a message out there about responsibility not only through council inspections and PINs and fines but also, as you signalled in your previous question, through community awareness. We are looking at some further revisions to the system at the moment, though I am satisfied that our present measures in asking councils to respond are giving them sufficient imperative to make sure that they continue their compliance inspections and that they do, albeit with some individual characteristics suited to their own area, keep up the pressure to ensure compliance.

Mr MALONE: Minister, page 2-16 of the MPS, dot point 1 under 'Future Development' mentions the commitment of \$25 million over five years commencing on 1 July 2006 to encourage regional collaboration between councils and help build service capacity. Under what terms will council be able to access this funding? And what is your expectation of how this funding will be spent?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is one of the new funding programs, as you signal, and one that I am pleased to say I was keen to see in place. Since I have been local government minister, I have been aware of some amazing initiatives of groups of councils around the state where they work together. As I have come across them, I have thought, 'Other local governments do not know about these. How can I get that information spread around to other councils so that they can see not only the costs that might be saved often by joint service delivery but also the effectiveness improvements?' For example, around the eastern downs there is a group of councils—10, I believe—that worked together and signed on to agreements for tourism projects and tourism promotion. They get very much more, as the saying goes, bang for their buck by working as 10 local authorities together marketing the whole regional area rather than as 10 separate local authorities all proceeding on their own.

Similarly, another example is in Thuringowa, where, due to difficulties of smaller resources of surrounding councils in obtaining building certifier services, Thuringowa and a group of councils—I believe seven or eight councils—have a joint contracted arrangement whereby Thuringowa, as the bigger council, will provide building certifiers to each of these other councils.

That is why that fund is there for five years starting on 1 July 2006. It goes towards promoting those kinds of regional service delivery mechanisms. There is approximately \$5 million a year. Since that idea came about, you would be well aware of the size, shape and sustainability conference, whereby local governments are taking the lead at looking at long-term structural or service delivery changes that may involve various regional models or even, in some cases, potential boundary changes and amalgamations. In order to have a look at those opportunities they need some expert advice. It requires some consultancies and some skills and expertise beyond the time available or even the skills available within their own councils. This fund will also serve any projects that councils might like to investigate that have some long-term changed structural or service delivery mechanisms.

We had thought that 1 July next year, as part of the new funding programs, would be timely, and right now we are developing the guidelines that will indicate how councils can best apply for that funding. It is intended that it be dollar for dollar and, therefore, the group of councils wishing to look at a proposal should put in half the money and the state would put in the other half.

CHAIR: The time allocated to questions by non-government members has expired. I call the member for Ipswich West.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, this year is the centenary of women's right to vote in Queensland and 40 years of Indigenous people having the right to vote in Queensland. How is the government promoting and recognising this important milestone?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. I know it is getting into the evening of what must be a very long day for you all, so before I answer that question I might give you a little bit of history. When I was discovering this hundred year anniversary, and last year working with a diverse group of women and men to develop anniversary celebrations and profiling activities during this year, I did some research into the Queensland parliament of 100 years ago and into the debate as to whether women should have the vote or not. It may be interesting for you to know that there were seven rounds by the suffragettes before, finally, the men of the Queensland parliament gave in and decided that women

would get the vote. There were many members of the then parliament who were opposed to women getting the vote for somewhat spurious reasons on occasion. There was one fellow—whose name I have strategically forgotten—who dared suggest that women should not have the vote because our brains were too small. There was another fellow who probably spoke closer to the truth when he said that, if you gave women the vote and if you let them participate more fully in society, then they would be out of the kitchen and out of the house and out of the housework and the cooking would suffer. Certainly in my case that has been proven to be true—with no remorse either!

This year we have decided that it should be a year of celebration but not just of celebration. As indicated by previous members' questions, we still have many problems for women in the state of Queensland such as domestic violence. Our motto, as it were, for the year and its celebrations therefore is celebrate the past and the tremendous distances that we have come but at the same time claim the future because women do not yet have full access, full safety and full ways of participating in Queensland society.

Through the Office for Women we put together an outline of numbers of events that would be easy to put on in your community and how best to go about these—the component materials, if you like—and a program list for how to establish them. We have publicised those quite widely, particularly through local governments. It is the country local governments, more than their urban counterparts, that have taken the lead. There are already 150 events registered with us. Many of the country councils have taken the opportunity to promote—whether through celebration, the publication of books or showcasing materials in their libraries—the pioneering women of their shires who have contributed substantively to the history and the progress in their towns and their districts.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Minister, leading on from that—and I appreciate that the local governments have chosen to showcase women—women appear to be under-represented in local governments throughout Australia at both elected and officer level. As the minister for both local government and women, what action are you taking to address that situation?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. Let us talk about the staffing side of councils first. From CEOs and across the council work force, these have been fine careers but they have not been recognised to be so by women historically, and we are keen to address that. The world of local government is a wonderful world with tremendous career opportunities in diverse fields and one that offers many opportunities right around the state and even interstate.

Presently, of the 157 local governments—and that includes, therefore, discrete Indigenous communities—there are fewer than 20 women chief executive officers or council clerks. In fact, a year ago it was less than 10, so we have done well to almost double the numbers. But we are starting from such a low base and we need to do much more. Therefore, I have established a committee of representatives from local governments around the state. I am working with the Office for Women towards promoting careers for women in local government and ensuring that people who do the hiring and firing in local government are well aware that it is time to make sure that their job ads appealed to both genders. We have also been working on the elected member side of local government. Approximately 30 per cent of all elected councillors in Queensland are women. However, when it comes to women mayors, we have only 30 women mayors out of 157 positions. So there is plenty of room yet for women on the elected member side to take a wider role.

Through the strategy group we have addressed some training issues, but we have also taken account of the fact that for a lot of women to stand for local government requires not so much training as it does a boost in confidence, a preparedness to step forward and to put up their hand rather than—pardon the vernacular—leaving it to the blokes. That does not mean that blokes have not been doing a fine job but it is our belief, from the point of view of the Office for Women, that local governments will be better local governments if the representation is more truly representative of their local community and therefore if there was closer to a half-and-half balance of women. We intend therefore to promote the tremendous benefits that can accrue from those women who stand for local government and are successful. I recognise that a member of the committee, Carryn Sullivan, has spent some time in local government, as have I—and by heaven, look at what happened to us. You could do worse but I suppose you could tell me tonight that you could also do better.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, there seems to be a growing interest within the community about local government structural reform. The Local Government Association of Queensland recently convened a Size, Shape and Sustainability Conference, which was attended by most local governments, to debate the issue. Can the minister explain her views on the need for local government structural reform?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for what is arguably the biggest question facing local government in Queensland today. In other states, as members would be aware, governments have moved to reform local government, mostly by their own direction and generally not in happy partnership with local government. I am mindful of that occurring in Victoria some years ago and occurring in New South Wales in recent years. I am aware, too, that in Western Australia at the time of the last state election, both major parties signalled that they would seek structural reform of local government.

I am pleased to say that in discussing that issue with the Local Government Association and with local governments around the state—as uncomfortable as the topic is—local governments in Queensland have clearly said that they recognise a need for change and that they prefer it is change that they decide on and take the lead on rather than change imposed by the state government. Therefore, they are the circumstances in which the LGAQ decided to hold a one and a half day conference to examine size, shape and sustainability. It was attended by representatives from all local governments in the state of Queensland. There were interesting speakers, not least of them the honourable member for Mirani and shadow spokesperson on local government matters, and myself and those who had experienced structural change in other states.

From my point of view, this is the situation: doing nothing is not an option. We have 157 local governments all doing the best they can. However, their systems, many of their boundaries and many of their ways of doing business are predicated on these 157 separate organisations with a history stretching back over 100 years. I believe that it is time for us to look to the next 10 to 20 years and decide if, perhaps, regional arrangements will give local governments greater financial feasibility, provide a stronger voice when they speak with state and Commonwealth governments, and give them a better ability to plan ahead for their region in terms of infrastructure, water and waste management rather than, as it were, going it alone in their same old circumstances.

Therefore, my push to them and my encouragement to them is to take up the fund that we mentioned before and to look not at tomorrow, next year or even the next local government election but rather at the long-term local governance of their community and to do some envisioning of what might be a stronger way to provide those important services.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Thank you, Minister, for your detailed response. In your response then you commented on boundary changes. What support can local governments wishing to review the current boundaries and service delivery arrangements expect from yourself?

Ms BOYLE: This is also an ancillary question, in a sense, but a very important question. It is a fine line, indeed, for the state government to tread to provide support without taking leadership or in any way hijacking the agenda for local government.

Of course, we already have in existence an electoral boundaries review commission. That has been available, as you would be aware, through our system and under the Local Government Act for any local governments that believe there should be significant boundary changes. At any time they can request referral to the boundaries commission through my office and that referral would be made. The boundaries commission, along with the Electoral Commission, would then consider the options and, where needed, consult with the community.

That service is still available to local governments around Queensland, but we are mindful that some may be in a kind of middle ground where they think that some boundary changes may well be advisable but are uncertain as to the exact boundary changes or even whether, for sure, that is the direction that they wish to take. They may wish to do some further studies to look at various models or various changes that might occur. That is one of the reasons behind the establishment of the \$25 million fund that I had referred to, which will be operational starting in July next year. It allows for an expert consideration by suitable professionals of the impacts of any changes.

There are issues in some council areas that might relate, for example, to finances, as to whether or not, as the years go by, some local governments will continue to be financially viable in their existing formats. For others it is a matter of a community of interest change, where a council has had such growth and that growth has spread over into a neighbouring shire that is primarily a rural shire, yet these are residents of the city council and focused on and using the facilities in the city shire area. In some other areas in Queensland, particularly in south-east Queensland, the growth has been so spectacular and extensive that the boundaries seem to be irrelevant, historical only and barely, if at all, within the awareness of residents of those shires.

Apart from the boundaries commission, this fund will help those very different circumstances in which local governments find themselves to wisely and steadily consider the various options that they have before them, which may include boundary changes.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, councils are still facing significant costs to upgrade sewage treatment plants and to provide secure and reliable water supplies. They are also facing new challenges such as managing stormwater, solid waste and erosion control. How will the new package of future funding that you announced in April help councils with these challenges?

Ms BOYLE: Water is the biggest issue for us all in Queensland, certainly in the southern half of Queensland. I have seen a tremendous shift in the attitudes of local government toward water, waste water treatment, stormwater and erosion control over the relatively short period that I have been the minister for local government. In March last year, lots of local governments were saying, 'Oh, the state government is requiring us to upgrade'; 'We have to have even higher standards and that will cost us more money; woe is us'. Not anymore. These days local councils are coming up with the most amazing proposals for re-use of water, for recycling water and for not only embracing the new standards being

set by the EPA for sewage outflows for any discharge of waters into catchments or out onto the Barrier Reef but also embracing it as an opportunity and recognising—and I am very pleased that it has been confirmed through the new funding programs that have been announced for the next five years—that whatever initiatives they come up with, the best initiatives that they can come up with, the state will assist them with the very substantial funding impacts. That impact would be more than could probably be borne by ratepayers, were it simply distributed to them.

I can give an example to the committee from an area that I know well—Cairns. The Cairns City Council has understood and accepted that four sewage treatment plants require upgrades, particularly in terms of the water that is being discharged into waterways and out towards the reef. What they were doing met the previous standards but will not meet the standards that the EPA will have in place by 1 July 2008. They have got well ahead of the action and developed project plans for these four plants. The first costing that has been done at this stage indicates \$140 million worth of works. That is why I am pleased that we have increased the total funding available to local governments, such as Cairns, to some \$800 million over the following five years. The great amount of this money will be spent on capital works related to water and water treatment projects. In the majority of circumstances, that will be on a dollar-for-dollar basis with local government. However, as the member for Mirani will already have noted, no doubt, the Smaller Communities Assistance Program, which provides a much higher percentage of subsidies will, of course, be available again in the five-year round of funding programs.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, referring to the budget highlights of your portfolio, with the expansion of the environmental health worker program to all Aboriginal shires, island councils and the Mornington and Aurukun shires, how will the increase in funding to \$8.7 million over four years be utilised to achieve improved environmental health outcomes to those communities?

Ms BOYLE: It is really important that we help Indigenous communities and other communities of Cape York and the Torres Strait islands to really get ahead. In order to do that they need not only funding from government but also expertise within their own communities to, for example, raise public health standards.

The Cape York environmental health worker pilot project was funded as part of the state's Meeting Challenges, Making Choices strategy and commenced in 2002-03 with a budget of \$2 million over four years. That project aimed to establish and maintain a sustainable and effective environmental health work force through the training and employment of Indigenous environmental health workers in 13 Aboriginal shire councils and island councils in Cape York.

In 2005 an independent evaluation of the pilot project was concluded. It found that, as a result, environmental health workers, environmental health programs and activities have been developed, tailored and integrated into Indigenous communities. This has improved monitoring and mitigation of a range of environmental risks and hazards, including regular solid waste collection and litter management, improved scheduled refuse tip management—including coverage of waste and reduced burning of refuse—water supply, treatment and monitoring, increased surveillance of removal of mosquito habitats, improved supervision of domestic sewage disposal systems, disaster management and assisting with disease investigation and management.

That evaluation recommended that environmental health workers be expanded to the 32 Indigenous councils, including the 15 Aboriginal shire councils and the 17 island councils, as well as to Mornington and Aurukun shire councils. That is what this budget vote of \$8.7 million over four years will achieve. Each of those councils will have their own environmental health worker who resides in their community, who can take the same standing as environmental health workers already do in the mainstream councils around Queensland and who will, I have no doubt at all, make a very significant contribution to the broader health of the community, as well as to lifting the standards of practice of Aboriginal and island councils.

I am pleased to say that this has been widely welcomed by those councils. I have seen with my own eyes the tremendous new initiatives that have already been undertaken, particularly in terms of waste management, by many of the councils that I visited in the cape. I have seen their pride in now having backyards and gardens which are clear for gardening and a proper refuse management facility at a suitable site some distance from the urban area.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Mirani.

Mr MALONE: Minister, I will continue the questioning that was started by the member for Ipswich West in regard to amalgamations. Minister, can you categorically rule out forced amalgamations by your government, both now and in the future, say before the next council election? A yes or no will do.

Ms BOYLE: The answer to the question is that I cannot guarantee the future about anything, of course, with my government or any future government. The circumstance at the moment for the Beattie government is this: in the last term of government it had a clearly articulated policy on paper of no forced amalgamations. That is still our policy, though we recognise that it is not as simple as maintaining that stance. If that were simply said with a full stop, it would not motivate local governments to consider

the options for the long-term future. Also, it would not deal with difficult circumstances, as has already arisen since I have been the minister, where one local government really wants to talk about a serious boundary change or even amalgamation and the neighbouring local authority is saying no.

Then the question has been put to me, 'Well, does that policy mean, for example, that if one local government says no—even though another might be seriously wanting to examine it—the naysayer always wins the day?' That is where I think the policy needs further consideration. What that consideration will be I cannot say because it has not been given yet and should not be given until local governments themselves are given the chance to decide the way forward. I hope sincerely, genuinely, that the state government will provide financial support, technical support and expertise from time to time but that the changes that will occur over these next whatever number of years—five to 10 years—will be those determined by local government of their own volition.

I am nonetheless aware already that there are differences of opinion between neighbouring councils and prepared that there may be some circumstance some years from now, not in the short term, where the state may be required to arbitrate. But I do not speculate about where that might be or when that might be because I think it is most important for the local governments to continue with the direction that they signalled at that Size, Shape and Sustainability conference. They have said that it is time for them all to stop pretending that they are, each of them, the best local government in Queensland, while they recognise that of course they are strong local governments in their ways—that it is time for them to have a look at more objective benchmarks, for each of them to do some self-assessment on what it is that they do well and what, in fact, is maybe less well done or even a weakness in terms of their sustainability for the long term. That is the first action, the most important action. The LGAQ will lead with establishing those benchmarks. They have approached my department to provide some funds potentially out of that \$25 million vote to assist in those studies, and that is as far as the position is at this time.

Mr MALONE: Back to the swimming pool issue, do I take it from the answers that you provided previously that your department really has no idea of the percentage of investigations that took place in terms of whether swimming pool inspections were of a random nature or not?

Ms BOYLE: We have some information, so 'no idea' is much too tough, I have to say to the member. But, no, we do not have a comprehensive survey of 157 councils that has that with actual numbers at any given date. Neither do we propose to go that way. That would be very time-consuming for my department as well as for the councils. I am not sure that it would achieve the primary objective of making toddlers safer. I am, for the time being, pleased with our continuing pressure, our public awareness, the reforms we are making to legislation, the occasional surveys that we do of key local governments and the news flash system that we have, as well as the training project that we have on board. That is a sufficient range of actions to ensure that this issue of safety around pools stays on the agenda for local governments.

Mr MALONE: Minister, page 2-16 of the MPS, dot point 4 under 'Future Developments', refers to more than \$593.1 million for grant and subsidy programs to assist local governments improve services to their communities. When I talk to local councils they raise the issue of improving the application process of these programs to account for funding needs as they arise. Minister, are you going to continue the process of a one-only call for applications for SCAP and RLIP applications for these various programs or will you put in place local councils' wishes and conduct a yearly call for applications?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the question. The information that you have from local government has not been so clearly put to me in a united fashion as it appears it has to you. The requests that I have had vary according to the particular program. The flexibility of putting in a submission under the Capital Works Subsidy Scheme at any time during the year is much appreciated—mostly, so they say, because these are really big projects, by and large, and it takes you some time to get them worked up, to get the costings done and to get the planning in place. There are lots of discussions along the way, and simply to be able to submit that at the appropriate time is the way they want that to stay.

On some other programs where they know it is more competitive, where there is a limit to the finances available in any given round and they know that their applications will have to be considered along with the other applications that come in from around the state, then it is necessary, of course, for those to be specified rounds, whether annual or, for that matter, biannual. We have the opportunity at the moment, of course, with the new funding programs to consider whether these should be changed from the past and so I would encourage you to say to those concerned local governments that this is exactly the time to let us know what changes they would like in terms of when we call for applications.

I must warn, however—and I have directly through conferences and my discussions and attendances at regional meetings with ROCs and the like—that for many of the funding programs that have particularly the opportunity to be beneficial in terms of water, waste water or waste management services we will be looking to fund those programs that are the most innovative and that will achieve the highest standards of management so far as water and waste is concerned and that the competition should be, in that regard, not about who gets their submission in first but whose submissions are the most meritorious.

Nonetheless, I take on board the views implicit in your question and ask that you and others concerned about that consult with my department and provide some messages to us via a submission or any other means in the near future.

Mr MALONE: Thank you, Minister. I refer to attachment A of the response to non-government question on notice No. 5. The actual expenditure figures for the Community Governance Improvement Strategy and Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure is well below what was budgeted for in 2004-05. Minister, is there a problem with access to these grants for Aboriginal and Islander shire councils or are they not being taken up because of the unsuitability of the grants?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that question. I am not sure about those figures and I will ask, therefore, that the director-general address that question to you in the first instance.

Mr Campbell: I will refer that question to Max Barrie, who runs the Community Governance Improvement Program.

Mr Barrie: I will refer to the Community Governance Improvement Strategy in the first instance. This year \$3 million was budgeted, and expenditure as at the end of June was \$2.6 million. Given that this was the first year of the strategy I guess \$2.6 million with a \$400,000 carryover is what we expected. In terms of the Indigenous Environmental Health Infrastructure grants, \$7.947 million was budgeted and \$4.49 million was expended. There were some reasons for that: delays in infrastructure in places like Lockhart River and Wujal Wujal, where native title issues delay the development of that infrastructure.

Mr MALONE: Thank you, Minister, page 2-11 of MPS, dot point 2 under 'Future Developments' refers to continuing the implementation of the Community Governance Improvement Strategy with respect to Aboriginal shire councils. I specifically want to ask about the remuneration of councillors as part of the new governance framework. Has your department had a role in assisting these councils to determine their levels of remuneration and can you explain how this is being funded?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is an issue that has raised some interest in some regional papers—not least, I might say, the *Cairns Post* in recent times. The honourable member would be well aware of the circumstances under the Local Government Act with the setting of remuneration by mainstream councils. The position is that they are asked to set their remuneration package and then to advertise that publicly and to receive any submissions prior to, at a full council meeting before the public, adopting the resolution for their remuneration package. That is quite properly what occurred, of course, around the 125 councils in Queensland after the last local government election.

Honourable members will remember that there were some councils where there was some community outcry about the extraordinary level of benefits, it seemed, that some councils were voting for themselves and there were a number of councils that changed, following public consultation, what their remuneration package was. At that time I was asked to intervene by some relatively small but nonetheless very concerned number of residents around Queensland and I declined to do so. Presently the system is that local councillors set their own remuneration package and that it is for them to face their ratepayers and to make that decision locally. It is not as easy as setting a level of remuneration that is suited to the diverse range of councils we have in Queensland. The circumstances, requirements, duties and responsibilities of a Brisbane city councillor are quite different from those of an Ipswich city councillor, are quite different from those of a Mirani shire councillor and are quite different in Charleville, Longreach, Isisford and so on. It was better to allow this flexibility.

Now that we have the Aboriginal local governments joining the mainstream councils they, too, have that option of setting their own remuneration package in order to catch them up, as it were, due to their recent shift over to the Local Government Act. They have been required to advertise their new proposals to their communities—that had to be done by 30 June—and to then adopt their new proposals, however altered, at a full council meeting. I have a copy of the proposed remuneration packages from the Aboriginal councils, and most of them are very modest and in line with the remuneration packages of other similar sized councils. Seven have advertised and passed their proposals, two have not yet advertised their proposals and three have advertised but not finalised. I would be pleased to provide further details to you.

Mr MALONE: When I visit Islander and Aboriginal communities I find that they are very passionate about becoming mainstream and actually being self-sustainable. In a recent visit it was put to me that the Vegetation Management Act and also the proposed wild rivers act will impact tremendously and indiscriminately on Aboriginal and Islander communities and basically exclude them from ever getting to a stage where they are sustainable or able to sustain themselves. Perhaps the minister would like to comment on those points of view.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that. They are points of view and expressed somewhat differently, it seems, when I visit them. There are those who are not happy with the Vegetation Management Act, which of course comes under the portfolio of Stephen Robertson, the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. There are others who recognise that the land has been degraded in

some areas and that the ban on wholesale clearing is, in fact, going to be beneficial to the environment and therefore to the health of their community and to whatever activities may take place on land or in surrounding lands.

It is similar with wild rivers, which also is the responsibility of the Minister for Natural Resources and Mines. I think it is a very exciting project and I would not have minded at all if it was a project for the Environmental Protection Agency, but that is not so. I am aware, however, of some concerns expressed to me by councils, particularly in the gulf area of Queensland, that this might in some way stop them from doing the things that they have been doing. There was one councillor who said to me, 'Well, that will put an end to camping by the river.' That is just a nonsense, of course. I am pleased to be able to reassure some of those who have expressed concerns that they are imagining much worse limitation on their activities than is at all being even considered under the wild rivers legislation. What that is about is making the most of these places that have not yet been dammed, that have not yet been affected by wide-scale human activity, and making sure that the integrity of the river system and the quality of the water stays for all time before development occurs. We can get ahead of the act.

Apart from that, one of the tremendous opportunities that is going to come out of wild rivers—that is already showing in some of the speculation of the opportunities for Aboriginal councils in the cape—is the tourism. It is going to be an extra good program that will benefit, I have no doubt, the facilities and practices along the banks of rivers and around the catchment areas.

For example, a problem was mentioned to me by the mayor of Burke shire. On one of their rivers they have had a tremendous problem for years with campers. People are coming through in increasing numbers on the Savannah Way. Some of the grey nomads camp wherever they like along the rivers. A proportion of them leave behind all kinds of rubbish and damage. What we can do to help that council—and as part of the broader project on that river—is ensure that there are good camping facilities, clear directions and clear management of human activities so that there is not degradation of that environment.

Mr MALONE: I think the alcohol management plans will put paid to that. I am not sure how many are going to camp there. On page 2-1 of the MPS at dot point 7, 'Strategic Issues' refers to the department seeking to achieve appropriate competency standards for builders, certifiers, plumbing inspectors and plumbers and drainers. As far as the complaints process goes and to follow up on the issue of lack of competence, which is not mentioned anywhere in the MPS, will you please detail the number of complaints about private building certifiers referred to the Building Services Authority in 2004-05? How does that actually compare with 2003-04?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. It is so specific that I will ask the director-general to address an answer to you.

Dr Campbell: If I can clarify the question. Are you asking for the numbers—

Mr MALONE: The number of complaints referred to the Building Services Authority?

Dr Campbell: That is under Minister Schwarten.

Mr MALONE: The private certifiers come under Local Government.

Dr Campbell: The private certifiers are actually licensed and the complaints go to the Building Services Authority.

Mr MALONE: So you are not notified of those complaints?

Dr Campbell: Not always, no

Mr MALONE: Have you got any idea of the number of complaints?

Mr Kuru: The director-general is right. The Building Services Authority licences the private certifiers on our behalf and also undertakes regular audits and deals with the complaints. We get regular reports from the Building Services Authority on those. We do not have those on hand with us.

Ms BOYLE: Might I add some information in case the honourable member is not already aware. I hear occasional generalised complaints from local councils about the building certification system. They come from different size local authorities and around the state of Queensland. So this is not an urban problem or a country problem.

The first and clear complaint—and it is vindicated—is that we have a shortage of building certifiers in the state of Queensland. I have met with their association and they are undertaking various moves to increase the number of licensed certifiers in the state of Queensland. Nonetheless how we can do that as quickly as we need to given the growth in Queensland is a difficult problem indeed.

Some councils have actually suggested that we lower the qualifications, but I do not think that is the answer. Instead I am proposing to work with the LGAQ towards reviewing the building certification system. I think we need to look more at the system and the long-term answers to the supply issue and the standard of the work that they do.

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

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: Minister, page 10 of the MPS mentions the commencement of the Community Governance Improvement Strategy. How is this strategy assisting new Aboriginal shires and Islander councils to consider more effective and efficient ways of delivering services to their communities?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. When Aboriginal councils joined the portfolio on 1 July last year, we were all hopeful, but a little nervous, you might say, as to how this was going to go and whether it would work. I am pleased to report that there has been tremendous enthusiasm on the part of Aboriginal councils, but not only on their part but also on the part of mainstream councils who have held out a hand to provide monitoring, training and assistance wherever they can to ensure that this is a good time ahead for local government.

Honourable members would be well aware that financial performance of Aboriginal councils has, for many of them—but not all—been poor from time to time. Too many of them have failed in one year or another to achieve unqualified audits. When you look behind that story, then what you discover is councils that do not have the expertise in their communities that would allow them to put in proper accounting and financial standard practices.

What you find is a system that I saw at one of the councils in the cape only a few weeks ago. That was a paper based system for a council that is spread across two buildings. A message comes in about something that money has to be spent on and that is written on a piece of paper which travels across five or six desks and two buildings. Then it is stored ready for audit at the end of year. Somebody sits down with all these pieces of paper and tries to work out who spent what and for what and under what and whether it was properly approved.

I am so pleased to tell you that as part of the Community Governance Improvement Strategy—and we are providing some funds towards it—most of the councils are now online. They have electronic systems for financial control that are up and running. They are being tutored by more expert staff, either directly through the department of local government and planning or through training and external consultancies. They are being assisted by the LGAQ.

It is not only financial standards and financial performance that has to change. They are keen to copy the other councils in terms of waste management, community development services and public consultation. I am pleased to say that in attending many of the conferences, in joining with the region groupings of councils, some of the Aboriginal councils are discovering that some of things that they have been doing they are doing better than others. They are able to participate and occasionally say, 'Let me give you an example of how we do it in our community.' That is particularly the case in terms of community services. They have provided for many years a much wider range of services than mainstream councils. It is a new day and we would hope for new and better financial and other standards in the years to come.

Mrs CARRYN SULLIVAN: The government has committed \$6.6 million over four years for reforms to the Integrated Planning Act. What is the electronic Development Assessment, or eDA initiative? Will this affect local government?

Ms BOYLE: The Integrated Planning Act story has not been entirely a happy one, as we would be well aware. The Integrated Planning Act has been implemented in substantial part but not completely. Now we have most of the councils working very hard to bring in their planning schemes. A number have already completed them and very many more will be finalised this year and in the early months of next year.

That is not the end of the story with our new integrated planning system, however. They need then to ensure that they have priority infrastructure plans in place and that they have a smooth way of dealing with the development applications. This is where the major problem with the new system has been shown to date for the councils that do have their new planning schemes in place. At the front counter they have a logjam.

Some of this is because the system is new. Some of it is because we have a shortage of planners not only in Queensland but also nationally. It is the rural and regional councils that have been drained of planners who are lured off by the private sector and bigger remuneration packages than the state or councils can offer.

But some of the problem, too, is the tremendous rush of development that we have had. The combination of those factors means that there are councillors who are overwhelmed every day of the week with development applications. That is presently a paper based system. Queensland has been working nationally on the development assessment forum, but spotted a modified electronic lodgment system that has been trialled in South Australia. We have done some more work on that and are expanding that so that we will have in the roll-out of this \$6.6 million program over the next four years a transition to a development assessment system that is no longer paper based but is an online electronic system.

We have no doubt at all that this will achieve better quality processing and smoother and faster processing than our present paper based system has done to date. The department deserves credit for this initiative which is being closely monitored by the other states of Australia that are moving

increasingly towards a planning system similar to that of Queensland's. They are hoping that they can borrow from our leadership with this eDA system that will be finalised in the years ahead.

Mr HOOLIHAN: To follow on that from last question, what assistance is the department actually giving to local governments to help them improve their level of knowledge and skills regarding the operation of the IPA planning and development system?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for that important question, which does follow on. It is one thing to write legislation and to design a new planning system, but having that truly understood by those in councils right around in Queensland who have to then administer it is another thing. We have, therefore, been directly providing training. The department conducted 15 training seminars in 12 centres around Queensland over this last year. Those centres included places like Brisbane and the Gold Coast and up the coast to places like Rockhampton and Townsville and across to the west to places like Mount Isa and Toowoomba and south to places like Beaudesert.

More than 1,100 council and state government officers have attended these seminars. We have had regional refresher seminars. These targeted those already in the planning business and who are properly qualified. More than 500 council and state government officers have attended these sessions. We have also worked with the LGAQ to develop a pilot diploma in local government planning course, which we are delivering now. This is particularly targeting planning assistants who have worked in planning departments of councils for years and may not be qualified planners but are often the people—many of them women—who do a lot of the processing and management of the files as they are assessed by various people and put through the system.

This pilot is a great success. We are close to the end of that first course and have no doubt that we will be delivering more. The interesting thing that has arisen in the feedback from those attending is that senior planners in our own council departments are saying, 'Could we go, too? We thought we understood the system but maybe we need a refresher, an update on the Integrated Planning Act and how the system works.'

We are also providing information and training on our infrastructure planning and charging framework. Many people have attended these seminars. We have a dedicated web site on the IPA that is updated regularly. We have a suite of information brochures. These are updated and targeted to elected representatives, to users of the planning system and to the general public. This is a continuing project of the department—one that will change shape but nonetheless continue at that intense level for this next year and probably for several years to come.

Mr HOOLIHAN: I will just change the focus. We have had some good rain recently, but given we still have drought conditions in areas across Queensland, what progress has the government made in providing for the use of grey water for garden irrigation in seweraged areas?

Ms BOYLE: I am pleased to report progress, though I admit slow progress. When I first got into this job I still had some of the perspective that you have from outside of the system which is, 'Here's a good idea. Let's put it in place.' That was my approach to grey water. I thought, 'Here is an obvious opportunity for us in Queensland to have grey water systems.' What a lot of nonsense! Presently legislation does not allow it. I thought, 'Let us fix it and have those systems rolled out all over the state of Queensland.' But it turned out, of course, to be a whole lot more complex than just getting that good idea.

We have therefore been working with other departments that have concerns or interests in grey water systems. Not least of these, I might say, is Health which is bothered of course about any potential health impact of pathogens that could be in grey water. The other department of particular interest is the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service where there has been quite widespread concern about grey water potentially being used through fire hydrants or for firefighting purposes. I am pleased to say that the Environmental Protection Agency, part of my portfolio, has offered tremendous assistance to the Department of Local Government and Planning at solving these problems and rolling out a system that will in the very near future allow for local governments to implement it in their local areas.

Part of the difficulty that arose is that it depends on soil type and it depends on climatic zone as to how effective the grey water systems might be and how appropriate, and that is why we have delegated the details of its implementation, albeit with expert advice from my department, to local government. We have of course consulted about this and received in fact over 50 submissions from local governments and industry organisations about grey water systems. The system that we are approving in the first instance is a subsurface irrigation system, and this will be particularly for laundry waste from washing machines and some bathroom waste from basins and from showers. That, we believe, is safe enough in the first instance in health terms yet can be a substantial amount of water more properly put to watering your garden or washing your car than potable water supplies. I believe that the legislation, which is due to be considered by parliament in the next few months, will be positively received by the parliament and that therefore the systems will be in place in 2006.

Mr HOOLIHAN: Thank you, Minister. When that legislation is introduced and considered, what safeguards will be in place to make sure that the use poses no risk to public health and to the environment? You mentioned the health department.

Ms BOYLE: Thank you for the further question on this topic. The amendments primarily will take place to the Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002 to allow local governments to approve home owners using grey water to water gardens in sewerred areas. This practice has previously been banned because of public health concerns. So to manage any risks to public health, grey water systems will have to use subsurface irrigation with pipes installed at least 100 millimetres below the surface. The reason for this is that that will avoid human contact with waste from laundry and showers, and such waste can of course at times include traces of human waste. It will also assist with managing any potential impact of amenity, particularly so far as odour is concerned. Odour on a surface area could be problematic, particularly if it was allowed to pool.

This is also the reason with regard to health concerns that we will not permit in this first instance any storage of grey water, though I am mindful of initiatives out there by private companies for the easy and simple treatment of grey water to ensure that the health risks are further addressed should some storage be allowed in the years to come. But we are not yet at that stage. The systems that will be able to be approved, presuming parliament's support, will only be for domestic homes where grey water generated is less than 3,000 litres per day and where there is sufficient land to distribute the water. We will leave it to councils to decide whether or not they wish to receive applications for grey water systems. The other reason that councils need this flexibility is because some councils are putting in elaborate systems for reuse and water recycling, and it may be in those areas that grey water systems are not needed when more elaborate water reuse initiatives are in place.

The grey water from kitchen sinks will not be permitted to be discharged to grey water systems as kitchen grease tends to clog filters and pipes. In case of excessive grey water discharge or system malfunction, we will require all grey water systems to automatically have overflow to the sewer and manual diversion will be available for times of high rainfall when garden water is not needed. It is critical that grey water use systems do not malfunction due to lack of maintenance by home owners. So to avoid this problem, the legislation will require local governments to maintain a record of approved systems and to audit these on a regular basis.

Mr LIVINGSTONE: Minister, page 1-10 of the Ministerial Portfolio Statement comments on the code of conduct for councillors. What does the government hope to achieve in introducing legislation to require councils to have a code of conduct for councillors?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much for the question. Until now Queensland has had no legislative requirement for local governments to adopt a code of conduct for their councillors. That was recommended many times over in a number of public reports, and I am pleased to say that some councils had of their own initiative adopted a code of conduct but it was a voluntary mechanism. Complaints were received from time to time by me and I am sure previous ministers about councillors whose behaviour was believed to be inappropriate at best and from time to time quite under question, even abusive, whether in council meetings or in meetings with others. These are councillors whose behaviour was considered to be improper in terms of breaches potentially of confidentiality or discussions that did not reflect well on the councillor or were even inaccurate about council decisions.

The Local Government Association of Queensland was keen therefore for us to follow through and to bring in a mandatory code of conduct for councillors—not sufficient to have just a code but to have enforceable provisions to a mandated code of conduct. The reason that we are the first is not because the others have not thought of it. In fact, as you think of a code of conduct as having signed on and signed literally a declaration that you will behave with integrity, that you will be mindful of proper council processes, that you will hold where necessary to principles of confidentiality and that you will behave with propriety at all times, policing that—finding ways to measure failures on the part of councillors and to, as it were, punish them for those failures—is indeed difficult.

We have come up with a two-tiered system for minor breaches as distinct from major breaches. For minor breaches in effect we are giving the mayors and councils the powers to more easily exclude councillors who have misbehaved from one or two meetings of council. For repeated breaches, we have instituted a system of conduct review panels which may well be regional panels that can consider the information placed before them. We have decided that the best system is not one of financial penalties for those who are found to have breached the code of conduct but instead, as it were, public shame. Therefore, the publication of breaches of the code of conduct will be public, will be noted in council minutes and will be printed in the annual report. This it would seem for an elected member as an aspersion on their integrity would be the most severe penalty of all.

CHAIR: Thank you, Minister. The time allocated for questions by government members has expired. I call the member for Mirani. You have one question.

Mr MALONE: Minister, I share your concerns about the sustainability of some local governments, but it is mainly because of the handing down of responsibility and the cost of compliance in most cases, and that is being caused by jurisdictions other than local government. On page 2-10 of the MPS under 'Advice and Service for Good Local Governance' it has one of your department's responsibilities as providing services to assist local governments to improve their performance and achieve a high standard of local governance. Minister, could you please provide—and maybe you need to do that on notice—to the committee those councils which are technically insolvent or in financial difficulties? Could you explain what action your department has taken to assist these councils and to protect the ratepayers?

Ms BOYLE: Thank you very much. I will ask the director-general to address it this evening so far as he is able, and we can of course, should that be necessary, provide further information at a later time. Might I say to you, nonetheless, that the financial difficulties that some councils are in and their future viability is not just because of the devolution of additional powers. It is in some cases because their rate base is too small and they even have declining populations where the proportion of grants and subsidies from state and Commonwealth government is even over 50 per cent or 60 per cent of their income, and that is continuing as the years go on. For some others it has been poor practice in the past and they need simply to repair the financially poor decisions made by their predecessors. Would you address that question please, Dr Campbell?

Dr Campbell: We do have a number of councils whose financial situation we are monitoring. Some of those of course are the Aboriginal and Islander councils where those things are pointed out by the Auditor-General in reports to parliament. But there are also other mainstream councils in the same situation in that, by applying to us through either loans or grants, we get a fairly close view of their financial situation. Some of those we are monitoring fairly closely and some of those we have had Queensland Treasury Corporation review and we are working very closely with them to develop plans. But Peter Bettess, the deputy director-general, has responsibility for that area, so I will ask him to give a little bit more detail on that.

Mr Bettess: What Dr Campbell said is correct. The department up until fairly recently relied upon the councils applying for loans or grants or the Auditor-General's report to highlight potential problems. But the department is putting in place what we are calling the local government information management system in conjunction with what we call Tropical, which are model financial statements. This will enable the department to more proactively monitor how councils are travelling. We are already starting to see some benefit of that to date. We had a situation where the Johnstone shire applied to us for some funding and we realised that they were in a difficult financial position going forward. As Dr Campbell said, we engaged the Queensland Treasury Corporation and the department and the Treasury Corporation jointly met with the shire and spoke to them about the sorts of measures that they would need to consider. There are a number of other councils that we have identified just on a preliminary overview, if you like, that could be facing difficulty. We are happy to provide those councils to you once we have confirmed that that is the situation.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, that concludes the examination of the proposed expenditure for the portfolio of the Minister for Environment, Local Government, Planning and Women. On behalf of the committee, I thank the minister and her advisers for their attendance today. The transcript of this hearing will be available on the Hansard internet quick access web site within two hours from now. That concludes the committee's consideration of the matters referred to it by the parliament on 10 June 2005. Before I close, I would like to thank the research director, Meg Hoban, and Hansard and all of the other parliamentary staff and all of the officers concerned. I declare this public hearing closed.

Committee adjourned at 6.43 pm